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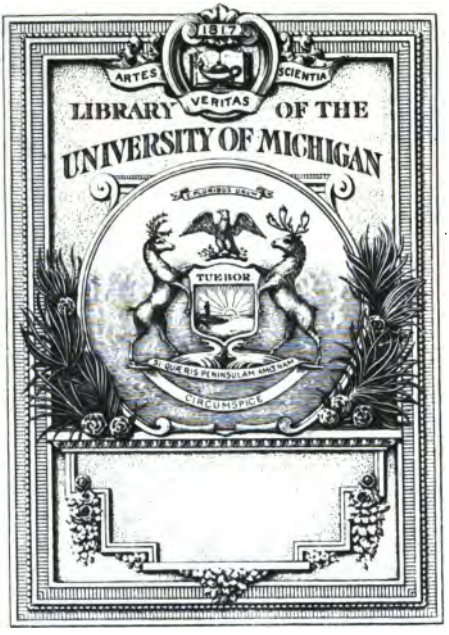
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MOTHERS TO MEN

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MOTHERS TO MEN

BY

ZONA GALE

AUTHOR OF "FRIENDSHIP VILLAGE," "FRIENDSHIP VILLAGE LOVE STORIES," "THE LOVES OF PELLEAS AND ETARRE," ETC.

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MOTHERS TO MEN

"DADDY!"

The dark was so thick with hurrying rain that the child's voice was drowned. So he splashed forward a few steps in the mud and puddles of the highway and plucked at the coat of the man tramping before. The man took a hand from a pocket and stooped somewhat to listen, still plodding ahead.

"Daddy! It's the hole near my biggest toe. My biggest toe went right through that hole an' it chokes my toe awful."

The man suddenly squatted in the mud, presenting a broad, scarcely distinguishable back.

"Climb up," he commanded.

The boy wavered. His body ached with weariness, his feet were sore and cold, something in his head was numb. But in a moment he ran on, two steps or three, past the man.

"Nope," he said, "I'm seeing if I could walk all the way. I could — yet. I just told you 'bout my toe, daddy, 'cause I *had* to talk about it."

The man said nothing, but he rose and groped for the child's arm and got it about the armpit, and, now and then as they walked, he pulled the shoulder awkwardly upward, trying to help.

After a time of silence the rain subsided a little, so that the child's voice was less like a drowned butterfly.

"Daddy," he said, "what's velvet?"

"I dunno, sonny. Some kind of black cloth, I guess. Why?"

"It came in my head," the child explained. "I was tryin' to think of nice things. Velvet sounds like a king's clothes — but it sounds like a coffin too. I didn't know if it's a nice thing."

This, the man understood swiftly, was because *her* coffin had been black velvet — the coffin which he had had no money to buy for her, for his wife and the boy's mother, the coffin which had been bought with the poor fund of a church which he had never entered. "What other nice thing you been thinkin' of?" he asked abruptly.

"Circus. An' angels. An' ice-cream. An' a barrel o' marbles. An' bein' warm an' clean stockin's an' rocked. . . ."

"My God!" said the man.

The child looked up expectantly.

"Did he say anything back?" he inquired eagerly.

"Not a word," said the man in his throat.

"Lemme try," said the child. "God — oh, God — *God dear!*" he called into the night.

From the top of the hill on the edge of the Pump pasture which in that minute they had reached, they suddenly saw, cheery and yellow and alive, the lamps of Friendship Village, shining in the valley; and away at one side, less in serene contemplation than in deliberate withdrawal, shone the lights of a house set alone on its hill.

"Oh, daddy, daddy — look at the lights!" the child cried. "God didn't say nothin' with words. Maybe he talks with lights instead of 'em."

The man quickened his steps until, to keep pace with him, the little boy broke into uneven running.

"Is those lights where we're goin', daddy?" he asked.

"That's where," said the man. He put his hand in his pocket and felt for the fifteen cents that lay there, wrapped in paper. The fancied odour and warmth of something to drink caught at him until he could hardly bear the longing.

But before he could get to the drink he must do something else. The man had been fighting away the thought of what he meant to do. But when they entered the village and were actually upon its main street, lonely in the rainy, eight o'clock summer dusk, what he meant to do had to be faced. So he began looking this way and that for a place to leave the child. There was a wagon shop. Old wagons stood under the open shed, their thills and tongues hanging, not expectant of journeys like those of new wagons, but idle, like the worn arms of beaten men. Some men, he thought, would leave the boy there, to sleep under a seat and be found in the morning; but he was no such father as that, he reflected complacently. He meant to leave the boy in a home, give him a fair start. There was a little house with a broken picket fence — someway *she* wouldn't have liked him to be there; she always liked things nice. He had never been able to give the boy much that was nice, but now, he said to himself, he would take nothing second rate. There was a grocery with a light above stairs where very likely the family lived, and there, too, was a dry stairway where the child could sit and wait until somebody came — no, not there either. . . . "The best ain't none too good for the little fellow," thought the man.

"Dad-*ee*!" cried the child suddenly.

He had run a few steps on and stood with his nose against the misty pane of Abagail Arnold's Home Bakery. Covered with pink mosquito-netting were a plate of sugar rolls, a fruit cake, a platter of cream puffs, and a tall, covered jar of shelled nuts.

"Hustle up — you!" said the man roughly, and took him by the arm again.

"I was comin'," said the little boy.

Why not leave the child at the bakery? No — a house. It must be a house, with a porch and a front stair and big upstairs rooms and a look of money-in-the-bank. He was giving care to the selection. It was as if he were exercising some natural paternal office, to be scrupulously discharged. Music issued from the wooden saloon building with the false two-story front and the coloured windows; from a protesting piano a dance tune was being furiously forced, and, as the door swung open, the tap and thud of feet, the swell of voices and laughter, the odour of the spirits caught at the cold and weary man. "Hurry along — hurry along!" he bade the boy roughly. That was where he would come back afterward, but first he must find the right place for the boy.

Vaguely he was seeking for that section of

the village which it would call "the residence part," with that ugly and naked appropriation of the term which excludes all the humbler homes from residence-hood at all. But when he had turned aside from the main street he came upon the First Church, with lights streaming from the ground-glass windows of the prayer-meeting room, and he stood still, staring up at it.

She had cared a good deal about that sort of thing. Churches did good — it was a church that had buried her when he could not. Why not there? Why not leave the child there?

He turned aside and mounted the three wooden steps and sat down, drawing the boy beside him. Grateful for a chance to rest, the child turned sidewise and dropped his head heavily on his father's arm. There was light enough for the father to see the thick, wet hair on the babyish forehead.

"I did walked all the way, didn't I?" the child said triumphantly.

"You bet you did," said his father absently.

Since the boy's mother had died only three months had passed, but in that time had been crowded for the child a lifetime of physical misery. Before that time, too, there had been hunger and cold and the torture of the continual

quarreling between that mother, sickly, half-fed, irritable, and this father, out of work and drunken. Then the mother had died, and the man had started out with the boy, seeking new work where they would not know his old vice. And in these three months, for the boy's sake, that old vice had been kept bound. For the boy's sake he had been sober and, if the chance had come, he would have been industrious. But, save for odd jobs, the chance never came; there seemed to be a kind of ineffectualness in the way he asked for work which forbade him a trial. Then one day, after almost three months of the struggle, he had waked to the old craving, to the need, the instant need, for liquor. He had faced the situation honestly. He knew, or thought he knew, his power of endurance. He knew that in a day or two he would be worsted, and that there would follow a period of which, afterward, he would remember nothing. Meanwhile, what of the boy? He had a fondness for the boy, and there remained to the man some shreds of decency and even of tradition. He would not turn him over to the "authorities." He would not cast him adrift in the city. He resolved to carry him to the country, to some near little town where, dimly it seemed to him, the people would be

more likely to take him in. "They have more time — an' more room — an' more to eat," he sought to explain it to himself. So he had walked, and the child had walked, from the City to Friendship Village. He must find a place to leave him: why not leave him here on the church steps, "outside the meetin'?"

"Don't you go to sleep, kiddie," he said, and shook him lightly.

"I was jus' restin' my eye-flaps. Eye-things. *What* are they, daddy?"

"Eye-lids."

"Yes. Them. They're tired, too," said the child, and smiled — the sleepy smile which gave his face a baby winsomeness. Then he snuggled in the curve of arm, like a drowsy, nosing puppy.

The father sat looking down on him, and in his breast something pulled. In these three months he had first become really acquainted with the boy, had first performed for him little personal offices — sewed on a button or two, bought him shoes, bound up a hurt finger. In this time, too, he had first talked with him alone, tried to answer his questions. "Where *is* my mamma, an' will she rock somebody else?" "Are you going to be my daddy till you die, an' *then* who'll be?" "What is the biggest thing everybody knows? Can I know it too?"

. . . Also, in these three months, at night he had gone to sleep, sometimes in a bed, oftener in a barn, now and again under the stars, with the child breathing within his reach, and had waked to keep him covered with his own coat. Now he was going to end all this.

"It ain't fair to the kid not to. It ain't fair to cart him around like this," he said over and over, defending himself before some dim dissenter.

The boy suddenly swung back from his father's arm and looked up in his face. "Will — will there be any supper till morning?" he asked.

You might have thought that the man did not hear, he sat so still looking down the wet road-ruts shining under the infrequent lamps. Hunger and cold, darkness and wet and ill-luck — why should he not keep the boy from these? It was not deserting his child; it was giving him into better hands. It did not occur to him that the village might not accept the charge. Anything would be better than what he himself had to give. Hunger and cold and darkness. . . .

"You stay still here a minute, sonny," said the man.

"You goin' 'way?" the child demanded.

"A minute. You stay still here — right

where you are," said the man, and went into the darkness.

The little boy sat still. He was wide awake now that he was alone; the walls of the dark seemed suddenly to recede, and instead of merely the church steps there was the whole black, listening world to take account of. He sat alert, trying to warm each hand on the cold wrist of its fellow. Where had his father gone? To find them a place to stay? Suppose he came back and said that he had found them a home; and they should go to it; and it would have a coal stove and a bedstead, and a pantry with cookies and brown sugar in the jars. And a lady would come and cook molasses candy for him. . . .

All this time something was hurting him intolerably. It was the foot, and the biggest toe, and the hole that was "choking" *him*. He fumbled at his shoe laces, but they were wet and the shoes were wet and sodden, and he gave it up. Where had his father gone? How big the world seemed when he was gone, and how *different* the night was. And when the lady had the molasses candy cooked, like in a story, she would cool it at the window and they would cut it in squares. . . .

As suddenly as he had gone, his father reappeared from the darkness.

"Here," he said roughly, and thrust in the child's hands a paper bag. And when he had opened it eagerly there were sugar rolls and cream puffs and a piece of fruit cake and some shelled nuts. Fifteen cents' worth of food, badly enough selected, in all conscience, but — fifteen cents' worth. The fifteen cents which the man had been carrying in his pocket, wrapped in paper.

"Now set there," said his father, "an' eat 'em up. An' listen, son. Set there till folks come out from in there. Set there till they come out. An' here's somethin' I'm puttin' in your coat pocket — see? It's a paper. Don't you look at it. But when the folks come out from in there — an' ask you anything — you show 'em that. Remember. Show 'em that."

In the prayer-meeting room the reed organ sent out some trembling, throaty chords, and the little group in there sang an old melody. It was strange to the man, as he listened —

> "Break thou the bread of life
> To me, to me —"

but, "That's it," he thought, "that's it. Break it to him — I can't. All I can give him is stuff in a paper bag, an' not always that. Now you break it to him —"

"Dad-*ee*!" cried the child. "You!"

Startled, the man looked down at him. It was almost like a counter charge. But the child was merely holding out to him half his store. The man shook his head and went down the steps to the sidewalk and turned to look back at the child munching happily from the paper sack. "Break it to him — break it to him — God!" the father muttered, as he might have used a charm.

Again the child looked out expectantly.

"Did he say anything back?" he asked eagerly.

"Not a word — not a word," said the man again. This time he laughed, nervously and foolishly. "But mebbe he will," he mumbled superstitiously. "I dunno. Now, you set there. An' then you give 'em the paper — an' go with anybody out o' the church that asks you. Dad may not get back for — quite a while. . . ."

The man went. The child, deep in the delight of a cream puff, wondered and looked after him troublously, and was vaguely comforted by the murmur of voices beyond the doors.

"Why, God didn't answer back because he was to the church meeting," the child thought, when he heard the people moving about within.

I

"INSIDE the church that night," Calliope Marsh is wont to tell it, "the Friendship Married Ladies Cemetery Improvement Sodality was having one of our special meetings, with hot chocolate and ice lemonade and two kinds of wafers. There wasn't a very big attendance, account of the rain, and there was so much refreshments ready that us ladies was urgin' the men to have all they wanted.

"'Drink both kinds, Timothy,' Mis Toplady says to her husband, persuadin'; 'it'll have to be throwed away if somebody don't drink it up.'

"'Lord, Amandy,' says Timothy, testy, 'I do hate to be sicked on to my food like that. It takes away my appetite, same as poison would.'

"'They always do it,' says Jimmy Sturgis, morose. 'My wife'll say to me, "Jimmy, eat up them cold peas. They'll spoil if you don't," and, "Jimmy, can't you make 'way with them cold pancakes?" Till I wish't I could starve.'

"'Well, if you hadn't et up things,' says Mis' Sturgis, mild, 'we'd of been scrappin' in the poor-house by now. I dunno but I'd ruther scrap where I am.'

"'Sure!' says Postmaster Silas Sykes, that always pours oil on troubled waters except when the trouble is his own; and then he churns them.

"'I dunno what ailed me in business meeting to-night,' says Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame Bliss. 'I declare, I was full as nervous as a witch. I couldn't keep my feet still anywheres.'

"'The fidgets,' comprehends Mis' Uppers, sympathetic. 'I get 'em in my feet 'long toward night sometimes. Turn an' twist an' shift — I know the feeling. Whenever my feet begin that, I always give right up an' take off my shoes an' get into my rubbers.'

"'Well, I wish't I had some rubbers now,' says Mis' Mayor Uppers. 'I wore my best shoes out to tea an' come right from tea here, like a maniac. An' now look at me, in my Three Dollar-and-a-half kids an' the streets runnin' rivers.'

"'You take my rubbers,' Mis' Timothy Toplady offered. 'I've set with 'em on all evening because I always get 'em mixed up at Sodality, an' I declare the water'll feel good to my poor feet.'

"'No, no, don't you trouble,' says Mis' Uppers. 'I'll just slip my shoes off an' track that one block in my stocking feet. Then I'll put 'em in good, hot water an' go to bed. I

wouldn't of come out to-night at all if it hadn't of been for the professor.'

"'For goodness' sakes,' I says, 'don't call him that. You know how he hates it.'

"'But I do like to say it,' Mis' Uppers insists, wistful. 'He's the only professor I ever knew.'

"'Me either,' I says — and I knew how she felt.

"Just the same, we was getting to like Mr. Insley too much to call him that if he didn't want it, or even 'doctor' that was more common, though over to Indian Mound College, half way between us and the City, he is one or both, and I dunno but his name tapers off with capital letters, same as some.

"'I just came over here to work,' he told us when we first see him. 'I don't profess anything. And "doctor" means teacher, you know, and I'm just learning things. Must you have a formal title for me? Won't Mr. do?'

"Most of the College called him just 'Insley,' friendly and approving, and dating back to his foot-ball days, and except when we was speaking to him, we commonly got to calling him that too. A couple of months before he'd come over from the College with a letter of introduction from one of the faculty to Postmaster Silas Sykes,

that is an alderman and our professional leading citizen. The letter from the College said that we could use Mr. Insley in any local civic work we happened to be doing.

"'Civic work?' Silas says to him, thoughtful. 'You mean shuttin' up saloons an' like that?'

"'Not necessarily,' he told him. 'Just work with folks, you know.'

"'Well-a, settin' out bushes?' Silas asks.

"'Whatever you're most interested in, Mr. Sykes,' says he. 'Isn't there some organization that's doing things here?'

"Silas wasn't interested in so very much of anything except Silas. But the word 'organization' helped him out.

"'There's the Friendship Married Ladies Cemetery Improvement Sodality,' says he. 'That must be the very kind of a thing you mean.'

"Insley laughed a little, but he let Mis' Sykes, that loves new things and new people, bring him to our next evening meeting in the church parlors, and he'd been back several times, not saying much, but just getting acquainted. And that rainy night, when the men met with us to talk over some money raising for Sodality, we'd asked him to come over too. We all liked him. He had a kind of a used-to-things way, and you felt like you'd always known him or, for the time

you hadn't, that you'd both missed something out; and he had a nice look too, a look that seemed to be saying 'good morning' and to be beginning a fine, new day — the best day yet.

"He'd set there kind of broodin' the most of that evening, drinking whatever anybody brought him, but not putting his mind to it so very much; but it was a bright broodin', an' one that made you think of something that's going to open and not just of something that's shut up. You can brood both ways, but the effect is as different as a bud from a core.

"'Speakin' of money raisin' for Sodality,' says Silas Sykes, kind of pretend hearty and pretend casual, like he does, 'why don't Sodality make some money off'n the Fourth of July? Everybody else is.'

("Sodality always speaks of itself and of the Cemetery real intimate, without the *the*, an' everybody's got to doing it.)

"Us ladies all set still and kept still. The Fourth of July, that was less than a week off, was a sore point with us, being we'd wanted a celebration that would *be* a celebration, and not merely a money-raiser for the town.

"'Oh, I say canvass, house to house,' says Timothy. 'Folks would give you a dime to get

you off'n the front porch that wouldn't come out to a dime entertainment, never.'

"'Why not ask them that's got Dead in their own families, to pay out for 'em, an' leave them alone that's got livin' mouths to feed?' says Threat Hubbelthwait, querulous. Threat ain't no relations but his wife, and he claims to have no Dead of his own. I always say they must be either living or dead, or else where's Threat come in? But he won't admit it.

"' What you raisin' money for anyhow?' asks Eppleby Holcomb, quiet. Eppleby always keeps still a long time, and then lets out something vital.

"As a matter of fact, Sodality didn't have no real work on hand, Cemetery lookin' real neat and tasty for Cemetery, and no immediate dead coming on as far as we could know; but we didn't have much of anything in the treasury, either. And when we didn't have any work on hand, we was in the habit of raising money, and when we'd got some money earnt, we was in the habit of devising some nice way to spend it. And so we kept Sodality real alive.

"'Well, there may not be any active dead just now,' Mis' Sykes explains it, 'but they are sure to die and need us. We had two country funerals to pay for last year. Or I might say,

one an' a half, one corpse contributing half enough for his own support in Cemetery.'

"With that Insley spoke up, kind of firm and nice, with muscles in his tone, like he does:

"'What's the matter with doing something with these folks before they die?' he asks.

"I guess we all looked kind of blank — like when you get asked *why* Columbus discovered America and all you know how to answer is just the date he done so on.

"'Well-a,' says Mis' Sykes, 'do what?'

"'Mustn't there be something to do with them, living, if there's everything to be done for them, dead?' Insley asks.

"'Well-a,' says Mis' Sykes, 'I don't know that I understand just how you mean that. Perhaps the Mission Band —'

"'No,' says Insley. 'You. Us.'

"I never knew a man to say so little and yet to get so much said.

"'Well-a,' says Mis' Sykes, 'of course Sodality was formed with the idee of caring for Cemetery. You see that lets in the Dead only.'

"'Gosh,' says Eppleby Holcomb, 'how exclusive.' But I don't know as anybody heard him but me.

"'I know,' says Insley, slow. 'Well, at any rate, perhaps there are things that all of us Liv-

ing might do together — for the sake, say, of earning some money for the Dead. There'd be no objection to that, would there?'

"'Oh, no,' says Mis' Sykes. 'I'm sure nobody could take exception to *that*. Of course you always have to earn money out of the living.'

"Insley looked at us all kind of shy — at one and another and another of us, like he thought he might find some different answer in somebody's eyes. I smiled at him, and so did Mis' Toplady, and so did Eppleby; and Mis' Eleanor Emmons, the widow-lady, lately moved in, she nodded. But the rest set there like their faces was on wrong side out and didn't show no true pattern.

"'I mean,' he says, not quite knowing how to make us understand what he was driving at, 'I mean, let's get to know these folks while they are alive. Aren't we all more interested in folks, than we are in their graves?'

"'*Folks*,' Timothy Toplady says over, meditative, like he'd heard of members, customers, clients, murderers and the like, but never of folks.

"'I mean,' Insley says again, 'oh, any one of a dozen things. For instance, do something jolly that'll give your young people something to do evenings — get them to help earn the money for

Cemetery, if you want to,' he adds, laughing a little.

"'There's goin' to be a Vigilence Committee to see after the young folks of Friendship Village, nights,' says Silas Sykes, grim.

"'You might have town parties, have the parties in schools and in the town hall,' Insley goes on, 'and talk over the Cemetery that belongs to you all, and talk over the other things besides the Cemetery that belong to you all. Maybe I could help,' he adds, 'though I own up to you now I'm really more fond of folks — speaking by and large — than I am of tombstones.'

"He said a little more to us, about how folks was doing in the world outside the village, and he was so humorous about it that they never knew how something inside him was hopping with hope, like I betted it was, with his young, divine enthusiasm. And when he'd got done he waited, all grave and eager, for somebody to peep up. And it was, as it would be, Silas Sykes who spoke first.

"'It's all right, it's all right,' says he, 'so long as Sodality don't go meddling in the village affairs — petitionin' the council and protestin' an' so on. That gets any community all upset.'

"'That's so,' says Timothy, nodding. 'Meet-

in', singin' songs, servin' lemonade an' plantin' things in the ground is all right enough. It helps on the fellow feelin' amazin'. But pitchin' in for reforms and things —' Timothy shook his head.

"'As to reforms,' says Insley, 'give me the fellowship, and the reforms will take care of themselves.'

"'Things is quite handy about takin' their course, though,' says Silas, 'so be we don't yank open the cocoons an' buds an' others.'

"'Well,' says Mis' Uppers, 'I can't do much more, Professor. I'm drove to death, as it is. I don't even get time to do my own improvin' round the place.' Mis' Uppers always makes that her final argument. 'Sew for the poor?' I've heard her say. 'Why, I can't even get my own fall sewing done.'

"'Me, too,' and, 'Me, either,' went round the circle. And, 'I can't do a great deal myself,' says Mis' Sykes, 'not till after my niece goes away.'

"I thought, 'I shouldn't think you could tend to much of anything else, not with Miss Beryl Sessions in the house.' That was the Sykes's niece, till then unknown to them, that we'd all of us heard nothing but, since long before she come. But of course I kept still, part because I was expecting an unknown niece of my own

in a week or so, and your unknown relatives is quite likely to be glass houses.

"'Another thing,' says Mis' Hubbelthwait, 'don't let's us hold any doin's in this church, kicking up the new cork that the Ladies' Aid has just put down on the floor. It'll all be tracked up in no time, letting in Tom, Dick, and Harry.'

"'Don't let's get the church mixed up in anything outside, for pity's sakes,' says Silas. 'The trustees'll object to our meeting here, if we quit working for a dignified object and go to making things mutual, promiscuous. Churches has got to be church-like.'

"'Well, Silas,' says Eppleby Holcomb, that hadn't been saying anything, 'I donno as some of us could bring ourselves to think of Christ as real Christ-like, if he come back the way he use' to be.'

"Insley sat looking round on them all, still with his way of saying good morning on a good day. I wondered if he wasn't wishing that they'd hang on that way to something worth hanging to. For I've always thought, and I think now, that they's a-plenty of stick-to-it-iveness in the world; but the trouble is, it's stuck to the wrong thing.

"The talk broke up after that, like somebody had said something in bad taste; and we con-

versed around in groups, and done our best to make 'way with the refreshments. And Insley set talking to Mis' Eleanor Emmons, the new widow, lately moved in.

"About Mis' Emmons the social judgment of Friendship Village was for the present hanging loose. This was partly because we didn't understand her name.

"'My land, was her husband a felon or a thief or what that she don't use his name?' everybody asked everybody. 'What's she stick her own name in front of his last name like that for? Sneaked out of usin' his Christian name as soon as his back was turned, *I* call it,' said some. 'My land, I'd use my dead husband's forename if it was Nebuchadnezzar. *My* opinion, we'd best go slow till she explains herself.'

"But I guess Insley had more confidence.

"'You'll help, I know?' I heard him say to Mis' Emmons.

"'My friend,' she says back, 'whatever I can do I'll do. It's a big job you're talking about, you know.'

"'It's *the* big job,' says Insley, quiet.

"Pretty soon Mis' Toplady got up on her feet, drawing her shawl up her back.

"'Well,' she says, 'whatever you decide, count on me — I'll always do for chinkin' in.

I've got to get home now and set my bread or it won't be up till day *after* to-morrow. Ready, Timothy? Good night all.'

"She went towards the door, Timothy following. But before they got to it, it opened, and somebody come in, at the sight of who Mis' Toplady stopped short and the talk of the rest of us fell away. No stranger, much, comes to Friendship Village without our knowing it, and to have a stranger walk unbeknownst into the very lecture-room of the First Church was a thing we never heard of, without he was a book agent or a travelling man.

"Here, though, was a stranger — and such a stranger. She was so unexpected and so dazzling that it shot through my head she was like a star, taking refuge from all the roughness and the rain outside — a star, so it come in my head, using up its leisure on a cloudy night with peepin' in here and there to give out brightness anyway. The rough, dark cheviot that the girl wore was sort of like a piece of storm-cloud clinging about that brightness — a brightness of wind-rosy face and blowy hair, all uncovered. She stood on the threshold, holding her wet umbrella at arm's length out in the entry.

"'I beg your pardon. Are you ready, Aunt Eleanor?' she asked.

"Mis' Eleanor Emmons turned and looked at her.

"'Robin!' she says. 'Why, you must be wet through.'

"'I'm pretty wet,' says the girl, serene, 'I'm so messy I won't come in. I'll just stop out here on the steps. Don't hurry.'

"'Wait a minute,' Mis' Emmons says. 'Stay where you are then, please, Robin, and meet these people.'

"The girl threw the door wide, and she stepped back into the vestibule, where her umbrella had been trailing little puddles; and she stood there against the big, black background of the night and the village, while Mis' Emmons presented her.

"'This is my niece, Miss Sidney,' she told us. 'She has just come to me to-day — for as long as I can keep her. Will you all come to see her?'

"It wasn't much the way Mis' Sykes had done, singing praises of Miss Beryl Sessions for weeks on end before she'd got there; nor the way I was doing, wondering secret about my unknown niece, and what she'd be like. Mis' Emmons introduced her niece like she'd always been one of us. She said our names over, and we went towards her; and Miss Sidney leaned a little inside the frame of the doorway and put

out her hand to us all, a hand that didn't have any glove on and that in spite of the rain, was warm.

"'I'm so sorry,' she says, 'I'm afraid I'm disgracing Aunt Eleanor. But I couldn't help it. I love to walk in the rain.'

"'That's what rain is for,' Insley says to her; and I see the two change smiles before Mis' Hubbelthwait's 'Well, I do hope you've got some good high rubbers on your feet' made the girl grave again — a sweet grave, not a stiff grave. You can be grave both ways, and they're as different from each other as soup from hot water.

"'I have, thank you,' she says, 'big storm boots. Did you know,' she adds, 'that somebody else is waiting out here? Somebody's little bit of a beau? And I'm afraid he's gone to sleep.'

"We looked at one another, wondering. Who was waiting for any of us? 'Not me,' one after another says, positive. 'We've all raced home alone from this church since we was born,' Mis' Uppers adds, true enough.

"We was curious, with that curiosity that it's kind of fun to have, and we all crowded forward into the entry. And a little to one side of the shining lamp path was setting a child — a little boy, with a paper bag in his arms.

II

"WHO on earth was he, we wondered to ourselves, and we all jostled forward, trying to see down to him, us women lifting up our skirts from the entry wet. He was like a little wad of clothes, bunched up on the top step, but inside them the little fellow was all curled up, sleeping. And we knew he hadn't come for any of us, and he didn't look like he was waiting for anybody in particular.

"Silas fixed up an explanation, ready-done:—

"'He must belong down on the flats,' says Silas. 'The idear of his sleepin' here. I said we'd oughter hev a gate acrost the vestibule.'

"'Roust him up an' start him home,' says Timothy Toplady, adviceful.

"'I will,' says Silas, that always thinks it's his share to do any unclaimed managing; and he brought down his hand towards the child's shoulder. But his hand didn't get that far.

"'Let me wake him up,' says Robin Sidney.

"She laid her umbrella in the wet of the steps and, Silas being surprised into giving way, she stooped over the child. She woke him up

neither by speaking to him nor grasping his arm, but she just slipped her hands along his cheeks till her hands met under his chin, and she lifted up his chin, gentle.

"'Wake up and look at me,' she says.

"The child opened his eyes, with no starting or bewildering, and looked straight up into her face. There was light enough for us all to see that he smiled bright, like one that's real glad some waiting is done. And she spoke to him, not making a point of it and bringing it out like she'd aimed it at him, but just matter-of-fact gentle and commonplace tender.

"'Whose little boy are you?' she ask' him.

"'I'm goin' with whoever wants me to go with 'em,' says the child.

"'But who are you — where do you live?' she says to him. 'You live, don't you — in this town?'

"The child shook his head positive.

"'I lived far,' he told her, 'in that other place. I come up here with my daddy. He says he might not come back to-night.'

"Robin Sidney knelt right down before him on the wet steps.

"'Truly,' she said, 'haven't you any place to go to-night?'

"'Oh, yes,' says the child, 'he says I must

go with whoever wants me to go with 'em. Do — do you?'

"At that Miss Sidney looked up at us, swift, and down again. The wind had took hold of a strand of her hair and blew it across her eyes, and she was pushing it away as she got up. And by then Insley was standing before her, back of the little boy, that he suddenly stooped down and picked up in his arms.

"'Let's get inside, shall we?' he says, commanding. 'Let's all go back in and see about him.'

"We went back into the church, even Silas taking orders, though of course that was part curiosity; and Insley sat down with the child on his knee, and held out the child's feet in his hand.

"'He's wet as a rat,' he says. 'Look at his shoes.'

"'Well-a, make him tell his name, why don't you?' says Mis' Sykes, sharp. '*I* think we'd ought to find out who he is. What's your name, Boy?' she adds, brisk.

"Insley dropped the boy's feet and took ahold of one of his hands. 'Yes,' he says, hasty, 'we must try to do that.' But he looked right straight over Mis' Sykes's shoulder to where, beyond the others, Robin Sidney was standing.

'He was your friend first,' he said to her. 'You found him.'

"She come and knelt down beside the child where, on Insley's knee, he sat staring round, all wondering and questioning, to the rest of us. But she seemed to forget all about the rest of us, and I loved the way she was with that little strange boy. She kind of put her hands on him, wiping the raindrops off his face, unbuttoning his wet coat, doing a little something to his collar; and every touch was a kind of a little stroke that some women's hands give almost without their knowing it. I loved to watch her, because I'm always as stiff as a board with a child — unless I'm alone with them. Then I ain't.

"'My name's Robin,' she says to the little fellow. 'What's yours, dear?'

"'Christopher,' he says right off. 'First, Christopher. An' then John. An' then Bartlett. Have you only got one name?' he asked her.

"'Yes, I've got two,' she says. 'The rest of mine is Sidney. Where —'

"'Only two?' says the child. 'Why, I've got three.'

"'Only two,' she answers. 'Where did your father go — don't you know that, Christopher?'

"That seemed to make him think of something, and he looked down at his paper bag.

"'First he bringed me these,' he says, and his face lighted up and he held out his bag to her. 'You can have one my cream-puffs,' he offers her, magnificent. I held my breath for fear she wouldn't take it, but she did. 'What fat ones!' she says admiring, and held it in her hand while she asked him more. It was real strange how we stood around, us older women and all, waiting for her to see what she could get out of him. But there wasn't any use. He was to go with whoever asked him to go — that was all he knew.

"Silas Sykes snaps his watch. 'It's gettin' late,' he gives out, with a backward look at nothing in particular. 'Hadn't we best just leave him at the police station? Threat Hubbelthwait and me go right past there.'

"Mis' Toplady, she sweeps round on him, pulling her shawl over her shoulders — one of them gestures of some women that makes it seem like even them that works hard and don't get out much of anywhere has motions left in them that used to be motioned in courts and castles and like that. 'Police station! Silas Sykes,' says she, queenly, 'you put me in mind of a stone wall, you're that sympathizin'.'

"'Well, *we* can't take him, Amandy,' Timothy Toplady reminds her, hurried. 'We live too far. 'Twouldn't do to walk him 'way there.' Timothy will give, but he wants to give to his own selected poor that he knows about; an' he won't never allow himself no luxuries in givin' here an' there, when something just happens to come up.

"'Land, he may of come from where there's disease — you can't tell,' says Mis' Uppers. 'I think we'd ought to go slow.'

"'Yes,' says two-three others, 'we'd best go slow. Why, his father may be looking for him.'

"Mis' Eleanor Emmons spoke up serene.

"'While we're going slow,' she says, 'I think I'll just take him home and get his feet dry. I live the nearest. Mr. Sykes, you might report him at the police station as you go by, in case someone is looking for him. And if nobody inquires, he can sleep on my couch beside my grate fire to-night. Can't he, Robin?'

"'I'd love it,' says the girl.

"'Excellent,' says Insley, and set the little boy on his feet.

"But when he done that, the child suddenly swung round and caught Miss Sidney's arm and looked up in her face; and his little nose was screwed up alarming.

"'What *is* it — what's the matter, Christopher?' she ask' him. And the rest of us that had begun moving to go, stopped to listen. And in that little stillness Christopher told us: —

"'Oh,' he says, 'it's that hole near my biggest toe. My biggest toe went right through that hole. And it's *chokin'* me.'

"Just exactly as if a hand had kind of touched us all, a nice little stir went round among us women. And with that, Insley, who had been standing there so big and strong and able and willing, and waiting for a chance to take hold, he just simply put his hands on his knees and stooped over and made his back right for the little fellow to climb up on. The child knew what it was for, soon enough — we see somebody somewheres must of been doing it for him before, for he scrambled right up, laughing, and Miss Sidney helping him. And a kind of a little ripple, that wan't no true words, run round among us all. Most women and some men is strong on ripples of this sort, but when it comes right down to doing something in consequence, we ain't so handy.

"'Leave me come along and help take care of him a little while,' I says; and I thought it was because I was ashamed of myself and trying to make up for not offering before. But

I think really what was the matter with me was that I just plain wanted to go along with that little boy.

"'I'm your automobile,' says Insley to the little fellow, and he laughed out, delighted, hanging onto his paper sack.

"'If you'll give me the big umbrella, Aunt Eleanor,' says Miss Sidney on the church steps, 'I'll try to keep the rain off the automobile and the passenger.'

"The rain had just about stopped when we four started down Daphne Street. The elms and maples along the sidewalk was dripping soft, and everybody's gardens was laying still, like something new had happened to them. It smelled good, and like everything outdoors was going to start all over again and be something else, sweeter.

"When we got most to Mis' Emmon's gate, I stopped stock still, looking at something shining on the hill. It was Proudfit House, lit up from top to bottom — the big house on the hill that had stood there, blind and dark, for months on end.

"'Why, some of the Proudfits must of come home,' I says out loud.

"Mis' Emmons answered up, all unexpected to me, for I never knew she knew the Proudfits.

'Mr. Alex Proudfit is coming on to-morrow,' she says. And I sort of resented her that was so near a stranger in the village hearing this about Alex Proudfit before I did, that had known him since he was in knickerbockers.

"'Am I keeping the rain off you two people?' Miss Sidney asks as, at the corner, we all turned our backs on Proudfit House.

"'Nobody,' Insley says — and his voice was always as smooth and round as wheels running along under his words, 'nobody ever kept the rain off as you are keeping it off, Miss Sidney.'

"And, 'I did walked all that way — in that rain,' says Christopher, sleepy, in his automobile's collar.

III

"If it was anyways damp or chilly, Mis' Emmons always had a little blaze in the grate — not a heat blaze, but just a Come-here blaze. And going into her little what-she-called living-room at night, I always thought was like pushing open some door of the dark to find a sort of cubby-corner hollowed out from the bigger dark for tending the homey fire. That rainy night we went in from the street almost right onto the hearth. And it was as pleasant as taking the first mouthful of something.

"Insley, with Christopher still on his back, stood on the rug in front of the door and looked round him.

"'How jolly it always looks here, Mrs. Emmons,' he says. 'I never saw such a hearty place.'

"I donno whether you've ever noticed the difference in the way women bustle around? Most nice women do bustle when something comes up that needs it. Some does it light and lifty, like fairies going around on missions; and some does it kind of crackling and nervous, like goblins on business. Mis' Emmons was the

first kind, and it was real contagious. You caught it yourself and begun pulling chairs around and seeing to windows and sort of settling away down deep into the minute. She begun doing that way now, seeing to the fire and the lamp-shade and the sofa, and wanting everybody to be dry and comfortable, instant.

"'You are so good-natured to like my room,' she says. 'I furnished it for ten cents — yes, not much more. The whole effect is just colour,' she says. 'What I have to do without in quality I go and wheedle out of the spectrum. What *should* we do without the rainbow? And what in the world am I going to put on that child?'

"Insley let Christopher down on the rug by the door, and there he stood, dripping, patient, holding his paper bag, and not looking up and around him, same as a child will in a strange room, but just looking hard at the nice, red, warm blaze. Miss Sidney come and stooped over him, with that same little way of touching him, like loving.

"'Let's go and be dry now,' she says, 'and then let's see what we can find in the pantry.'

"The little fellow, he just laughed out, soft and delicious, with his head turned away and without saying anything.

"'I never said such a successful thing,' says Miss Sidney, and led him upstairs where we could hear Mis' Emmons bustling around cosey.

"Mr. Insley and I sat down by the fire. I remember I looked over towards him and felt sort of nervous, he was so good looking and so silent. A good-looking *talking* man I ain't afraid of, because I can either admire or despise him immediate, and either way it gives me something to do answering back. But one that's still, it takes longer to make out, and it don't give you no occupation for your impressions. And Insley, besides being still, was so good looking that it surprised me every new time I see him. I always wanted to say: Have you been looking like that all the time since I last saw you, and how *do* you keep it up?

"He had a face and a body that showed a good many men looking out of 'em at you, and all of 'em was men you'd like to of known. There was scholars that understood a lot, and gentlemen that acted easy, and outdoor men that had pioneered through hard things and had took their joy of the open. All of them had worked hard at him — and had give him his strength and his merriness and his big, broad shoulders and his nice, friendly boyishness, and his eyes

that could see considerably more than was set before them. By his own care he had knit his body close to life, and I know he had knit his spirit close to it, too. As I looked over at him that night, my being nervous sort of swelled up into a lump in my throat and I wanted to say inside me: O God, ain't it nice, ain't it nice that you've got some folks like him?

"He glanced over to me, kind of whimsical.

"'Are you in favour of folks or tombstones?' he asks, with his eyebrows flickering up.

"'Me?' I says. 'Well, I don't want to be clannish, but I do lean a good deal towards folks.'

"'You knew what I meant to-night?' he says.

"'Yes,' I answered, 'I knew.'

"'I thought you did,' he says grave.

"Then he lapsed into keeping still again and so did I, me through not quite knowing what to say, and him — well, I wasn't sure, but I thought he acted a good deal as if he had something nice to think about. I've seen that look on people's faces sometimes, and it always makes me feel a little surer that I'm a human being. I wondered if it was his new work he was turning over, or his liking the child's being cared for, or the mere nice minute, there

by the grate fire. Then a door upstairs shut, and somebody come down and into the room, and when he got up, his look sort of centred in that new minute.

"It was Miss Sidney that come in, and she set down by the fire like something pleased her.

"'Aunt Eleanor is going to decorate Christopher herself,' she says. 'She believes that she alone can do whatever comes up in this life to be done, and usually she's right.'

"Insley stood looking at her for a minute before he set down again. She had her big black cloak off by then, and she was wearing a dress-for-in-the-house that was all rosy. She wasn't anything of the star any longer. She was something more than a star. I always think one of the nicest commonplace minutes in a woman's everyday is when she comes back from somewheres outside the house where she's been, and sets down by the fire, or by a window, or just plain in the middle of the room. They always talk about pigeons 'homing'; I wish't they kept that word for women. It seems like it's so exactly what they *do* do.

"'I love the people,' Miss Sidney went on, 'that always feel that way — that if something they're interested in is going to be really well done, then they must do it themselves.'

"Insley always knew just what anybody meant — I'd noticed that about him. His mind never left what you'd said floating round, loose ends in the room, without your knowing whether it was going to be caught and tied; but he just nipped right onto your remark and *tied it in the right place.*

"'I love them, too,' he says now. 'I love anybody who can really feel responsibility, from a collie with her pups up. But then I'm nothing to go by. I find I'm rather strong for a good many people that can't feel it, too — that are just folks, going along.'

"I suppose he expected from her the nice, ladylike agreeing, same as most women give to this sort of thing, just like they'd admit they're fond of verbenas or thin soles. But instead of that, she caught fire. Her look jumped up the way a look will and went acrost to his. I always think I'd rather have folks say 'I know' to me, understanding, than to just pour me out information, and that was what she said to him.

"'I know,' she says, 'on the train to-day — if you could have seen them. Such dreadful-looking people, and underneath — the *giving-up-ness.* I believe in them,' she added simple.

"When a thing you believe gets spoke by

somebody that believes it, too, it's like the earth moved round a little faster, and I donno but it does. Insley looked for a minute like he thought so.

"'I believe in them,' he says; 'not the way I used to, and just because I thought they must be, somehow, fundamentally decent, but because it's true.'

"'I know just when I first knew that,' Miss Sidney says. 'It come to me, of all places, in a subway train, when I was looking at a row of faces across the car. Nobody, *nobody* can look interesting in that row along the side of a subway car. And then I saw. . . .'

"She thought for a minute and shook her head.

"'I can't tell you,' she says, 'it sounds so little and — no account. It was a little thing, just something that happened to a homely woman with a homely man, in a hat like a pirate's. But it almost — let me in. I can do it ever since — look into people, into, or through, or with . . .' she tries to explain it. Then her eyes hurried up to his face, like she was afraid he might not be understanding. He just nodded, without looking at her, but she knew that he knew what she meant, and that he meant it, too.

" . . . I thought it was wonderful to hear them. I felt like an old mountain, or anything natural and real ancient, listening to the Song of Believing, sung by two that's young and just beginning. We all sing it sometime in our lives — or Lord grieve for them that never do — and I might as well own up that I catch myself humming that same song a good deal of the time, to keep myself a-going. But I love to hear it when it's just begun.

"They was still talking when Mis' Emmons come downstairs with Christopher. Land, land but the little chap looked dear, dragging along, holding up a long-skirted lounging dress of Mis' Emmons's. I never had one of them lounging dresses. There's a lot of common things that it never seems to me I can buy for myself: a nice dressing-gown, a block of black pins, a fancy-headed hat pin, and a lemon-squeezer. I always use a loose print, and common pins, and penny black-headed hat pins, and go around squeezing my lemons by hand. I donno why it is, I'm sure.

"'I'm — I'm — I'm — a little boy king!' Christopher stutters, all excited and satisfied, while Insley was a-packing him in the Morris chair.

"'Rained on!' says Mis' Emmons, in that

kind of dismay that's as pure feminine as if it had on skirts. 'Water isn't a circumstance to what that dear child was. He was saturated — bless him. He must have been out for perfect hours.'

"Christopher, thinking back into the rain, mebbe, from the pleasantness of that minute, smiled and took a long breath.

"'I walked from that other place,' he explains, important.

"Mis' Emmons knew he was hungry, and she took Miss Sidney and Insley off to the kitchen to find something to eat, and left me with the little fellow, me spreading out his clothes in front of the fire to dry. He set real still, like being dry and being with somebody was all he wanted. And of course that is a good deal.

"I don't always quite know how to start talking to a child. I'm always crazy to talk with them, but I'm so afraid of that shy, grave, criticizin' look they have. I feel right off like apologizing for the silly question I've just asked them. I felt that way now when Christopher looked at me, real dignified and wondering. 'What you going to be when you grow up to be a man?' was what I had just asked him. And yet I don't know what better question I could of asked him, either.

"'I'm goin' to have a cream-puff store, an' make it all light in the window,' he answers ready.

"'All light in the window?' I says puzzled.

"'And I'm going to keep a church,' he goes on, 'and I'm going to make nice, black velvet for their coffings.'

"I didn't know quite what to make of that, not being able to think back very far into his mind. So I kept still a few minutes.

"'What was you doin' in the church?' he says to me, all at once.

"'I don't really know. Waiting for you to come, I guess, Christopher,' I says.

"'*Was* you?' he cried, delighted. 'Pretty soon I came!' He looked in the fire, sort of troubled. 'Is God outdoors nights?' he says.

" I said a little something.

"'Well,' he says, 'I thought he was in the house by the bed when you say your prayer. An' I thought he was in church. But I don't think he stays in the dark, much.'

"'Mebbe you don't,' I says, 'but you wait for him in the dark, and mebbe all of a sudden some night you can tell that something is there. And just you wait for that night to come.'

"'That's a nice game,' says Christopher, bright. 'What game is that?'

"'I donno,' I says. 'Game of Life, I guess.'

"He liked the sound; and he set there — little waif, full of no supper, saying it over like a chant: —

"'Game o' life — game o' life — game o' l-i-f-e —'

"Just at that minute I was turning his little pockets wrong side out to dry them, and in one of them I see a piece of paper, all crumpled up and wrinkled. I spread it out, and I see it had writing on. And I held it up to the light and read it, read it through twice.

"'Christopher,' I says then, 'where did you get this piece of paper? It was in your pocket.'

"He looked at it, blank, and then he remembered.

"'My daddy,' he says. 'My daddy told me to give it to folks. I forgot.'

"'To folks?' I says. 'To what folks?'

"'To whoever ask' me anything,' he answers. 'Is it a letter?' he ask'.

"'Yes,' I says, thoughtful, 'it's a letter.'

"'To tell me what to do?' he ask' me.

"'Yes,' I says, 'but more, I guess, to tell us what to do.'

"I talked with him a little longer, so's to get his mind off the paper; and then I told him to set still a minute, and I slipped out to where the rest was.

"The pantry had a close, spicey, foody smell of a pantry at night, when every tin chest and glass jar may be full up with nice things to eat that you'd forgot about — cocoanut and citron and cinnamon bark. In grown-up folks one of the things that is the last to grow up is the things a pantry in the evening promises. You may get over really liking raisins and sweet chocolate; you may get to wanting to eat in the evening things that you didn't use' to even know the names of and don't know them now, and yet it never gets over being nice and eventive to go out in somebody's pantry at night, especially a pantry that ain't your own.

"'Put everything on a tray,' Mis' Emmons was directing them, 'and find the chafing-dish and let's make it in there by Christopher. Mr. Insley, can you make toast? Don't equivocate,' she says; '*can* you make toast? People fib no end over what they can make. I'm always bragging about my omelettes, and yet one out of every three I make goes flat, and I know it. And yet I brag on. Beans, buckwheat, rice — what do you want to cream, Robin? Well, look in the store-room. There may be something there. We must tell Miss Sidney about Grandma Sellers' store-room, Mr. Insley,' she says, and then tells it herself, laughing like a girl,

how Grandma Sellers, down at the other end of Daphne Street, has got a store-room she keeps full of staples and won't let her son's wife use a thing out. 'I've been hungry,' Grandma Sellers says, 'and I ain't ashamed of that. But if you knew how good it feels to have a still-room stocked full, you wouldn't ask me to disturb a can of nothing. I want them all there, so if I should want them.' 'She's like me,' Mis' Emmons ends, 'I always want to keep my living-room table tidy, to have a place in case I should want to lay anything down. And if I put anything on it, I snatch it up, so as to have a place in case I want to lay anything down.'

"They was all laughing when I went out into the kitchen, and I went up to Mis' Emmons with the paper.

"'Read that,' I says.

"She done so, out loud — the scrawlin', downhill message:—

"'Keep him will you,' the paper said, 'I don't chuck him to get rid of but hes only got me since my wifes dead and the drinks got me again. Ive stood it quite awhile but its got me again so keep him and oblidge. will send money to him to the P O here what I can spare I aint chuckin him but the drinks got me again.

"'resp, his father.

"'P S his name is Christopher Bartlett he is a good boy his throat gets sore awful easy.'

"When Mis' Emmons had got through reading, I remember Miss Sidney's face best. It was so full of a sort of a leaping-up pity and wistfulness that it went to your heart, like words. I knew that with her the minute wasn't no mere thrill nor twitter nor pucker, the way sad things is to some, but it was just a straight sounding of a voice from a place of pain. And so it was to Insley. But Mis' Emmons, she never give herself time to be swamped by anything without trying to climb out right while the swamping was going on.

"'What'll we do?' she says, rapid. 'What in this world shall we do? Did you ever hear of anything — well, I wish somebody would tell me what we're going to do.'

"'Let's be glad for one thing,' says Allen Insley, 'that he's here with you people to-night. Let's be glad of that first — that he's here with you.'

"Miss Sidney looked away to the dark window.

"'That poor man,' she says. 'That poor father. . . .'

"We talked about it a little, kind of loose ends and nothing to fasten to, like you will. Mis'

Emmons was the first to get back inside the minute.

"'Well,' she says, brisk, 'do let's go in and feed the child while we have him. Nobody knows when he's had anything to eat but those unholy cream-puffs. Let's heat him some broth and let's carry in the things.'

"Back by the fire Christopher set doing nothing, but just looking in the blaze like his very eyesight had been chilly and damp and needed seeing to. He cried out jolly when he see all the pretty harness of the chafing-dish and the tray full of promises.

"'Oh,' he cries, '*Robin!*'

"She went over to him, and she nestled him now like she couldn't think of enough to do for him nor enough things to say to keep him company. I see Insley watching her, and I wondered if it didn't come to him like it come to me, that for the pure art of doing nothing so that it seems like it couldn't be got along without, a woman — some women — can be commended by heaven to a world that always needs that kind of doing nothing.

"'Children have a genius for getting rid of the things that don't count,' Miss Sidney says. 'I love his calling me "Robin." Mustn't there be some place where we don't build walls around our names?'

"Insley thought for a minute. 'You oughtn't to be called "Miss," and you oughtn't to wear a hat,' he concluded, sober. 'Both of them make you — too much *there*. They draw a line around you.'

"'I don't feel like Miss to myself,' she says, grave. 'I feel like Robin. I believe I *am* Robin!'

"And I made up my mind right then and there that, to myself anyway, I was always going to call her Robin. It's funny about first names. Some of them fit right down and snuggle up close to their person so that you can't think of them apart. And some of them slip loose and dangle along after their person, quite a ways back, so that you're always surprised when now and then they catch up and get themselves spoke by someone. But the name Robin just seemed to wrap Miss Sidney up in itself so that, as she said, she *was* Robin. I like to call her so.

"It was her that engineered the chafing-dish. A chafing-dish is a thing I've always looked on a little askant. I couldn't cook with folks looking at me no more than I could wash my face in company. I remember one hot July day when there was a breeze in my front door, I took my ironing-board in the parlor and tried to iron there. But land, I felt all left-handed; and I know it would be that way if I ever tried to

cook in there, on my good rug. Robin though, she done it wonderful. And pretty soon she put the hot cream gravy on some crumbled-up bread and took it to Christopher, with a cup of broth that smelled like when they used to say, 'Dinner's ready,' when you was twelve years old.

"He looked up at her eager. 'Can you cut it in squares?' he asked.

"'In what?' she asks him over.

"'Squares. And play it's molasses candy — white molasses candy?' he says.

"'Oh,' says Robin, 'no, not in squares. But let's play it's hot ice-cream.'

"'*Hot ice-cream*,' he says, real slow, his eyes getting wide. To play Little Boy King and have hot ice-cream was about as much as he could take care of, in joy. Sometimes I get to wondering how we ever do anything else except collect children together and give them nice little simple fairylands. But while, on the sly, we was all watching to see Christopher sink deep in the delight of that hot toothsome supper, he suddenly lays down his spoon and stares over to us with wide eyes, eyes that there wasn't no tears gathering in, though his little mouth was quivering.

"'What is it — what, dear?' Robin asks, from her stool near his feet.

"'My daddy,' says the little boy. 'I was thinking if he could have some this.'

"Robin touched her cheek down on his arm.

"'Blessed,' she says, 'think how glad he'd be to have you have some. He'd want you to eat it — wouldn't he?'

"The child nodded and took up his spoon, but he sighed some. 'I wish't he'd hurry,' he says, and ate, obedient.

"Robin looked up at us — I don't think a woman is ever so lovely as when she's sympathizing, and it don't make much difference what it's over, a sore finger or a sore heart, it's equally becoming.

"'I know,' she says to us, 'I know just the *place* where that hurts. I remember, when I was little, being in a house that a band passed, and because mother wasn't there, I ran inside and wouldn't listen. It's such a special kind of hurt. . . .'

"From the end of the settle that was some in the shadow, Insley set watching her, and he looked as if he was thinking just what I was thinking: that she was the kind that would most always know just the place things hurt. And I bet she'd know what to do — and a thousand kinds of things that she'd go and do it.

"'O . . . ' Christopher says. 'I like this

most next better than molasses candy, cutted in squares. I do, Robin!' He looked down at her, his spoon waiting. 'Is you that Robin Redbreast?' he inquired.

"'I'm any Robin you want me to be,' she told him. 'To-morrow we'll play that, shall we?'

"'Am I here to-morrow? Don't I have to walk to-morrow?' he ask' her.

"'No, you won't have to walk to-morrow,' she told him.

"Christopher leaned back, altogether nearer to luxury than I guess he'd ever been.

"'I'm a little boy king, and it's hot ice-cream, and I love *you*,' he tops it off to Robin.

"She smiled at him, leaning on his chair.

"'Isn't it a miracle,' she says to us, 'the way we can call out — being liked? We don't do something, and people don't pay any attention and don't know the difference. Then some little thing happens, and there they are — liking us, doing a real thing.'

"'I know it,' I says, fervent. 'Sometimes,' I says, 'it seems to me wonderful cosey to be alive! I'm glad I'm it.'

"'So am I,' says Insley, and leaned forward. 'There's never been such a time to be alive,' he says. 'Mrs. Emmons, why don't we ask Miss Sidney for some plans for our plan?'

"Do you know how sometimes you'll have a number of floating ideas in your mind — wanting to do this, thinking that would be nice, dreaming of something else — and yet afraid to say much about it, because it seems like the ideas or the dreams is much too wild for anybody else to have, too? And then mebbe after a while, you'll find that somebody had the same idea and dreamed it out, and died with it? Or somebody else tried to make it go a little? Well, that was what begun to happen to me that night while I heard Insley talk, only I see that my floating ideas, that wan't properly attached to the sides of my head, was actually being worked out here and there, and that Insley knew about them.

"I donno how to tell what my ideas was. I'd had them from time to time, and a good many of us ladies had, only we didn't know what to do with them. And an idea that you don't know what to do with is like a wild animal out of its cage: there ain't no performance till its adjusted. For instance, when we'd wanted to pave Daphne Street and the whole town council had got up and swung its arms over its head and said that having an economical administration was better than paving — why, then us ladies had all had the same idee about that.

"'Is the town run for the sake of being the town, with money in its treasury, or is the town run for the folks in it?' I remember Mis' Toplady asking, puzzled. 'Ain't the folks the town really?' she ask'. 'And if they are, why can't they pave themselves with their own money? Don't that make sense?' she ask' us, and we thought it did.

"Us ladies had got Daphne Street paved, or at least it was through us they made the beginning, but there was things we hadn't done. We was all taking milk of Rob Henney that we knew his cow barns wasn't at all eatable, but he was the only milk wagon, nobody else in town delivering, so we kept on taking, but squeamish, squeamish. Then there was the grocery stores, leaving their food all over the sidewalk, dust-peppered and dirt-salted. But nobody liked to say anything to Silas Sykes that keeps the post-office store, nor to Joe Betts, that his father before him kept the meat market, being we all felt delicate, like at asking a church member to come out to church. Then us ladies had bought a zinc wagon and started it around to pick up the garbage to folks' doors, but the second summer the council wouldn't help pay for the team, because it was a saving council, and so the wagon was setting in a shed, with its hands

folded. Then there was Black Hollow, that we'd wanted filled up with dirt instead of scummy water, arranging for typhoid fever and other things, but the council having got started paving, was engaged in paving the swamp out for miles, Silas Sykes's cousin being in the wooden block business. And, too, us ladies was just then hopping mad over the doings they was planning for the Fourth of July, that wasn't no more than making a cash register of the day to earn money into. All these things had been disturbing us, and more; but though we talked it over considerable, none of us knew what to do, or whether anything could be. It seemed as though every way we moved a hand, it hit out at the council or else went into some business man's pocket. And not having anybody to tell us what other towns were doing, we just set still and wished, passive.

"Well, and that night, while I heard Insley talking, was the first I knew that other towns had thought about these things, too, and was beginning to stir and to stir things. Insley talked about it light enough, laughing, taking it all casual on the outside, but underneath with a splendid earnestness that was like the warp to his words. He talked like we could pick Friendship Village up, same as a strand if we wanted,

and make it fine and right for weaving in a big pattern that his eyes seemed to see. He talked like our village, and everybody's village and everybody's city wasn't just a lot of streets laid down and walls set up, and little families and little clubs and little separate groups of folks organized by themselves. But he spoke like the whole town was just one street and *no* walls, and like every town was a piece of the Big Family that lives on the same street, all around the world and back again. And he seemed to feel that the chief thing all of us was up to was thinking about this family and doing for it and being it, and getting it to be the way it can be when we all know how. And he seemed to think the things us ladies had wanted to do was some of the things that would help it to be the way it can.

"When he stopped, Robin looked up at him from the hearth-rug: '"The world is beginning,"' she quotes to him from somewheres; '"I must go and help the king."'

"He nodded, looking down at her and seeing, as he must have seen, that her face was all kindled into the same kind of a glory that was in his. It was a nice minute for them, but I was so excited I piped right up in the middle of it:—

"'Oh,' I says, '*them* things! Was it them

kind of things you meant about in Sodality tonight that we'd ought to do? Why, us ladies has wanted to do things like that, but we felt sort of sneaking about it and like we was working against the council and putting our interests before the town treasury —'

"'And of the cemetery,' he says.

"'Is *that*,' I ask' him, 'what you're professor of, over to Indian Mound college?'

"'Something like that,' he says.

"'Nothing in a book, with long words and italics?' I ask' him.

"'Well,' he says, 'it's getting in books now, a little. But it doesn't need any long words.'

"'Why,' I says, 'it's just being professor of human beings, then?'

"'Trying to be, perhaps,' he says, grave.

"'Professor of Human Beings,' I said over to myself; 'professor of being human. . . .'

"On this nice minute, the front door, without no bell or knock, opened to let in Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss, with a shawl over her head and a tin can in her hand.

"'No, I won't set any, thanks,' she says. 'I just got to thinking — mercy, no. Don't give me any kind of anything to eat any such time of night as this. I should be up till midnight taking soda. That's what ails folks' stomachs,

my notion — these late lunches on nobody knows what. No, I got to bed and I was just dropping off when I happened to sense how wringing wet that child was, and that I betted he'd take cold and have the croup in the night, and you wouldn't have no remedy — not having any children, so. It rousted me right up wide awake, and I dressed me and run over here with this. Here. Put some on a rag and clap it on his chest if he coughs croupy. I donno's it would hurt him to clap it on him, anyway, so's to be sure. No, I can't stop. It's 'way past my bed-time. . . .'

"'There's lots of professors of being human, Miss Marsh,' Insley says to me, low.

"Mis' Holcomb stood thinking a minute, brushing her lips with the fringe of her shawl.

"'Mebbe somebody up to the Proudfits' would do something for him,' she says. 'I see they're lit up. Who's coming?'

"'Mr. Alex Proudfit will be here to-morrow,' Mis' Emmons told her. 'He has some people coming to him in a day or two, for a house party over the Fourth.'

"'Will he be here so soon?' says Insley. 'I've been looking forward to meeting him — I've a letter to him from Indian Mound.'

"'Whatever happens,' says Mis' Holcomb,

'I'll get up attic first thing in the morning and find some old clothes for this dear child. I may be weak in the pocket-book, but I'm strong on old duds.'

"Insley and I both said good night, so's to walk home with Mis' Holcomb, and Christopher kissed us both, simple as belonging to us.

"'We had that hot ice-cream,' he announced to Mis' Holcomb.

"'The lamb!' says she, and turns her back, hasty.

"I wondered a little at Mis' Emmons not saying anything to her about the letter we'd found, that made us know somebody would have to do something. But just as we was starting out, Mis' Emmons says to me low, 'Don't let's say anything about his father yet. I have a plan —I want to think it over first.' And I liked knowing that already she had a plan, and I betted it was a plan that would be born four-square to its own future.

Insley stood holding the door open. The rain had stopped altogether now, and the night was full of little things sticking their heads up in deep grasses and beginning to sing about it. I donno about what, but about something nice. And Insley was looking toward Robin, and I see that all the ancestors he'd ever had

was lingering around in his face, like they knew about something he was just beginning to know about. Something nice — nicer than the little outdoor voices.

"'Good night, Miss Sidney,' he says. 'And what a good night for Christopher!' And he looked as if he wanted to add: 'And for me.'

"'Good night, Mis' Emmons,' I says. 'It's been an evening like a full meal.'

IV

"By messenger the next day noon come a letter for me that made me laugh a little and that made me a little bit mad, too. This was it:—

"'Dear Calliope:

"'Come up and help straighten things out, do. This place breathes desolation. Everything is everywhere except everything which everyone wants, which is lost. Come at once, Calliope, pray, and dine with me to-night and give me as much time as you can for a fortnight. I'm having some people here next week — twenty or so for over the Fourth — and a party. A company, you know! I need you.

"'Alex Proudfit.'

"It was so exactly like Alex to send for me just plain because he wanted me. Never a word about if I was able or if I wasn't putting up berries or didn't have company or wasn't dead. I hadn't heard a sound from him in the two years or more that he'd been gone, and yet now it was just 'Come,' like a lord. And for that

matter like he used to do when he was in knickerbockers and coming to my house for fresh cookies, whether I had any baked or not. But I remember actually baking a batch for him one day while he galloped his pony up and down the Plank Road waiting for them. And I done the same way now. I got my work out of the way and went right up there, like I'd always done for that family in the forty years I could think back to knowing them, when I was a girl. I guessed that Alex had lit down sudden, a day or so behind his telegram to the servants; and I found that was what he had done.

"Proudfit House stands on a hill, and it looks like the hill had billowed up gentle from underneath and had let some of the house flow down the sides. It was built ambitious, of the good cream brick that gives to a lot of our Middle West towns their colour of natural flax in among the green; it had been big in the beginning, and to it had been added a good many afterthoughts and postscripts of conservatory and entrance porch and sun room and screened veranda, till the hill couldn't hold them all. The house was one of them that was built fifty years ago and that has since been pecked and patted to suit modern uses, pinched off here and pulled off there to fit notions refining themselves gradual. And

all the time the house was let to keep some nice, ugly things that after a while, by mere age and use-to-ness, were finally accepted wholesale as dignified and desirable. The great brown mansard roof, niched and glassed in two places for statues — and having them, too, inside my memory and until Mr. Alex pulled them down; the scalloped tower on a wing; the round red glass window on a stairway — these we all sort of come to agree to as qualities of the place that couldn't be changed no more'n the railroad track. Tapestries and water-colours and Persian carpets went on inside the house, but outside was all the little twists of a taste that had started in naked and was getting dressed up by degrees.

"Since the marriage of her daughter Clementina, Madame Proudfit had spent a good deal of time abroad, and the house had been shut up. This shutting up of people's houses always surprises me. When I shut up my house to go away for a couple of months or so, I just make sure the kitchen fire is out, and I carry the bird down to Mis' Holcomb's, and I turn the key in the front door and start off. But land, land when Proudfit House is going to be shut, the servants work days on end. Rugs up, curtains down, furniture covered and setting around out of place, pictures and ornaments wrapped up

in blue paper — I always wonder *why*. Closing my house is like putting it to sleep for a little while, but closing Proudfit House is some like seeing it through a spasm and into a trance. They done that to the house most every summer, and I used to think they acted like spring was a sort of contagion, or a seventeen-year locust, or something to be fumigated for. I supposed that was the way the house looked when Alex got home to it, and of course a man must hate it worse than a woman does, because he doesn't know which end to tell them to take hold of to unravel. So I went right up there when he sent for me — and then it was a little fun, too, to be on the inside of what was happening there, that all the village was so curious about.

"He'd gone off when I got there, gone off on horseback on some business, but he'd left word that he'd be back in a little while, and would I help him out in the library. I knew what that meant. The books was all out of the shelves and packed in paper, and he wanted me to see that they got back into their right places, like I'd done many and many a time for his mother. So I worked there the whole afternoon, with a couple of men to help me, and the portrait of Linda Proudfit on the wall watching me like it wanted to tell me something, maybe

about the way she went off and died, away from home; and a little after four o'clock a servant let somebody into the room.

"I looked up expecting to see Alex, and it surprised me some to see Insley instead. But I guessed how it was: that Alex Proudfit being a logical one to talk over Friendship Village with, Insley couldn't lose a day in bringing him his letter.

"'Well, Miss Marsh,' says he, 'and do you live everywhere, like a good fairy?'

"I thought afterwards that I might have said to him: 'No, Mr. Insley. And do you appear everywhere, like a god?' But at the time I didn't think of anything to say, and I just smiled. I'm like that, — if I like anybody, I can't think of a thing to say back; but to Silas Sykes I could talk back all day.

"We'd got the room part in order by then, and Insley sat down and looked around him, enjoyable. It was a beautiful room. I always think that that library ain't no amateur at its regular business of being a vital part of the home. Some rooms are awful amateurs at it, and some ain't no more than apprentices, and some are downright enemies to the house they're in. But that library I always like to look around. It seems to me, if I really knew

about such things, and how they ought to be, I couldn't like that room any better. Colour, proportion, window, shadow — they was all lined up in a kind of an enjoyable professionalism of doing their best. The room was awake now, too — I had the windows open and I'd started the clock. Insley set looking around as if there was sighs inside him. I knew how, down in New England, his father's home sort of behaved itself like this home. But after college, he had had to choose his way, and he had faced about to the new west, the new world, where big ways of living seemed to him to be sweeping as a wind sweeps. He had chose as he had chose, and I suppose he was glad of that; but I knew the room he had when he was in town, at Threat Hubbelthwait's hotel, must be a good deal like being homesick, and that this library was like coming home.

"'Mr. Proudfit had just returned and would be down at once,' the man come back and told him. And while he waited Insley says to me:

"'Have you seen anything of the little boy to-day, Miss Marsh?'

"I was dying to answer back: 'Yes, I see Miss Sidney early this morning,' but you can't answer back all you die to. So I told him yes, I'd seen all three of them and they was to be

up in the city all day to buy some things for Christopher. Mis' Emmons and Robin was both to come up to Proudfit House to Alex's house party — seems they'd met abroad somewheres a year or more back; and they was going to bring Christopher, who Mis' Emmons didn't show any sign of giving up while her plan, whatever it was, was getting itself thought over. So they'd whisked the child off to the city that day to get him the things he needed. And there wasn't time to say anything more, for in come Alex Proudfit.

"He was in his riding clothes — horseback dress we always call it in the village, which I s'pose isn't city talk, proper. He was long and thin and brown, and sort of slow-moving in his motions, but quick and nervous in his talk; and I don't know what there was about him — his clothes, or his odd, old-country looking ring, or the high white thing wound twice around his neck, or his way of pronouncing his words — but he seemed a good deal like a picture of a title or a noted man. The minute you looked at him, you turned proud of being with him, and you pretty near felt distinguished yourself, in a nice way, because you was in his company. Alex was like that.

"'I don't like having kept you waiting,' he

says to Insley. 'I'm just in. By Jove, I've left Topping's letter somewhere — Insley, is it? thank you. Of course. Well, Calliope, blessings! I knew I could count on you. How are you — you look it. No, don't run away. Keep straight on — Mr. Insley will pardon us getting settled under his nose. Now what can I get you, Mr. Insley? If you've walked up, you're warm. No? As you will. It's mighty jolly getting back — for a minute, you know. I couldn't stop here. How the devil do you stop here all the time — or do you stop here all the time? . . .' All this he poured out in a breath. He always had talked fast, but now I see that he talked more than fast — he talked foreign.

"'I'm here some of the time,' says Insley; 'I hoped that you were going to be, too.'

"'I?' Alex said. 'Oh, no — no. I feel like this: while I'm in the world, I want it at its best. I want it at its latest moment. I want to be living *now*. Friendship Village — why, man, it's living half a century ago — anyway, a quarter. It doesn't know about A.D. nineteen-anything. I love the town, you know, for what it is. But confound it, I'm living *now*.'

"Insley leaned forward. I was dusting away on an encyclopædia, but I see his face and I

knew what it meant. This was just what he'd been hoping for. Alex Proudfit was a man who understood that the village hadn't caught up. So he would want to help it — naturally he would.

"'I'm amazed at the point of view,' Alex went on. 'I never saw such self-sufficiency as the little towns have. In England, on the continent, the villages know their place and keep it, look up to the towns and all that — play the peasant, as they are. Know their betters. Here? Bless you. Not a man down town here but will tell you that the village has got everything that is admirable. They believe it, too. Electric light, water, main street paved, cemetery kept up, "nice residences," telephones, library open two nights a week, fresh lettuce all winter — fine, up-to-date little place! And, Lord, but it's a back-water. With all its improvements the whole *idea* of modern life somehow escapes it — music and art, drama, letters, manners, as integral parts of everyday living — what does it know of them? It thinks these things are luxuries, outside the scheme of real life, like monoplanes. Jove, it's delicious!'

"He leaned back, laughing. Insley must have felt his charm. Alex always was fascinating. His eyes were gray and sort of hob-

nobbed with your own; his square chin just kind of threatened a dimple without breaking into one; his dark hair done clusters like a statue; and then there was a lot of just plain charm pouring off him. But of course more than with this, Insley was filled with his own hope: if Alex Proudfit understood some things about the village that ought to be made right, it looked to him as though they might do everything together.

"'Why,' Insley says, 'you don't know — you don't know how glad I am to hear you say this. It's exactly the thing my head has been full of. . . .'

"'Of course your head is full of it,' says Alex. 'How can it help but be when you're fast here some of the time? If you don't mind — what is it that keeps you here at all? I don't think I read Topping's letter properly. . . .'

"Insley looked out from all over his face.

"'I stay,' he says, 'just because all this *is* so. It needs somebody to stay, don't you think?'

"'Ah, yes, I see,' says Alex, rapid and foreign. 'How do you mean, though? Surely you don't mean renouncing — and that sort of thing?'

"'Renouncing — no!' says Insley. 'Getting into the game.'

"He got his enthusiasm down into still places and outlined what he meant. It was all at the ends of his fingers — what there was to do if the town was to live up to itself, to find ways to express the everyday human fellowship that Insley see underneath everything. And Alex Proudfit listened, giving that nice, careful, pacifying attention of his. He was always so polite that his listening was like answering. When Insley got through, Alex's very disagreeing with him was sympathizing.

"'My dear man,' says he — I remember every word because it was something I'd wondered sometimes too, only I'd done my wondering vague, like you do — 'My dear man, but are you not, after all, anticipating? This is just the way Nature works — beating these things into the heads and hearts of generations. Aren't you trying to do it all at once?'

"'I'm trying to help nature, to be a part of nature — exactly,' says Insley, 'and to do it here in Friendship Village.'

"'Why,' says Alex, 'you'll be talking about facilitating God's plan next — helping him along, by Jove.'

"Insley looks at him level. 'I mean that now,' he says, 'if you want to put it that way.'

"'Good Lord,' says Alex, 'but how do you know what — what he wants?'

"'Don't you?' says Insley, even.

"Alex Proudfit turned and touched a bell. 'Look here,' he says, 'you stay and dine, won't you? I'm alone to-night — Calliope and I are. Stay. I always enjoy threshing this out.'

"To the man-servant who just about breathed with a well-trained stoop of being deferential, his master give the order about the table. 'And, Bayless, have them hunt out some of those tea-roses they had in bloom the other day — you should see them, Calliope. Oh, and, Bayless, hurry dinner a bit. I'm as hungry as lions,' he added to us, and he made me think of the little boy in knickerbockers, asking me for fresh cookies.

"He slipped back to their topic, ranking it right in with tea-roses. In the hour before dinner they went on 'threshing it out' there in that nice luxurious room, and through the dinner, too — a simple, perfect dinner where I didn't know which to eat, the plates or the food, they was both so complete. Up to Proudfit House I can hardly ever make out whether I'm chewing flavours or colours or shapes, but I donno as I care. Flavours, thank my stars,

aren't the only things in life I know how to digest.

"First eager, then patient, Insley went over his ground, setting forth by line and by line, by vision and by vision, the faith that was in him—faith in human nature to come into its own, faith in the life of a town to work into human life at its best. And always down the same road they went, they come a-canterin' back with Alex Proudfit's 'Precisely. It is precisely what is happening. You can't force it. You mustn't force it. To do the best we can with ourselves and to help up an under dog or two — if he deserves it — that's the most Nature lets us in for. Otherwise she says: "Don't meddle. I'm doing this." And she's right. We'd bungle everything. Believe me, my dear fellow, our spurts of civic righteousness and national reform never get us anywhere in the long run. In the long run, things go along and go along. You can't stop them. If you're wise, you won't rush them.'

"At this I couldn't keep still no longer. We was at the table then, and I looked over to Alex between the candlesticks and felt as if he was back in knickerbockers again, telling me God had made enough ponies so he could gallop his all day on the Plank Road if he wanted to.

"'You and Silas Sykes, Alex,' I says, 'have come to the same motto. Silas says Nature is real handy about taking her course so be you don't yank open cocoons and buds and like that.'

"'Old Silas,' says Alex. 'Lord, is he still going on about everything? Old Silas. . . .'

"'Yes,' I says, 'he is. And so am I. Out by my woodshed I've got a Greening apple tree. When it was about a year old a cow I used to keep browst it down. It laid over on the ground, broke clean off all but one little side of bark that kept right on doing business with sap, like it didn't know its universe was sat on. I didn't get time for a week or two to grub it up, and when I did go to it, I see it was still living, through that little pinch of bark. I liked the pluck, and I straightened it up and tied it to the shed. I used to fuss with it some. Once in a storm I went out and propped a dry-goods box over it. I kept the earth rich and drove the bugs off. I kind of got interested in seeing what it would do next. What it done was to grow like all possessed. It was twenty years ago and more that the cow come by it, and this year I've had seven bushels of Greenings off that one tree. Suppose I hadn't tied it up?'

"'You'd have saved yourself no end of

trouble, dear Calliope,' says Alex, 'to say nothing of sparing the feelings of the cow.'

"'I ain't so anxious any more,' says I, 'about sparing folks' feelings as I am about sparing folks. Nor I ain't so crazy as I used to be about saving myself trouble, either.'

"'Dear Calliope,' says Alex, 'what an advocate you are. Won't you be my advocate?'

"He wouldn't argue serious with me now no more than he would when he was in knickerbockers. But yet he was adorable. When we got back to the library, I went on finishing up the books and I could hear him being adorable. He dipped down into the past and brought up rich things — off down old ways of life in the village that he'd had a part in and then off on the new ways where his life had led him. Java — had Insley ever been in Java? He must show him the moonstone he got there and tell him the story they told him about it. But the queerest moonstone story was one he'd got in Lucknow — so he goes on, and sends Bayless for a cabinet, and from one precious stone and another he just naturally drew out romances and adventures, as if he was ravelling the stones out into them. And then he begun taking down some of his old books. And when it come to books, the appeal to Insley was like

an appeal of friends, and he burrowed into them musty parchments abundant.

"'By George,' Insley says once, 'I didn't dream there were such things in Friendship Village.'

"'Next thing you'll forget they're in the world,' says Alex, significant. 'Believe me, a man like you ought not to be down here, or over to Indian Mound, either. It's an economic waste. Nature has fitted you for her glorious present and you're living along about four decades ago. Don't you think of that? . . .'

"Then the telephone on the library table rang and he answered a call from the city. 'Oh, buy it in, buy it in, by all means,' he directs. 'Yes, cable to-night and buy it in. That,' he says, as he hung up, 'just reminds me. There's a first night in London to-night that I've been promising myself to see. . . . What a dog's life a business man leads. By the way,' he goes on, 'I've about decided to put in one of our plants around here somewhere — a tannery, you know. I've been off to-day looking over sites. I wonder if you can't give me some information I'm after about land around Indian Mound. I'm not saying anything yet, naturally— they'll give other people a bonus to establish in their midst, but the smell of leather is too much for

them. We always have to surprise them into it. But talk about the ultimate good of a town . . . if a tannery isn't that, what is it?'

"It was after nine o'clock when I got the books set right — I loved to handle them, and there was some I always looked in before I put them up because some of the pictures give me feelings I remembered, same as tasting some things will — spearmint and caraway and coriander. Insley, of course, walked down with me. Alex wanted to send us in the automobile, but I'm kind of afraid of them in the dark. I can't get it out of my head that every bump we go over may be bones. And then I guess we both sort of wanted the walk.

"Insley was like another man from the one that had come into the library that afternoon, or had been talking to us at Mis' Emmons's the night before. Down in the village, on Mis' Emmons's hearth, with Robin sitting opposite, it had seemed so easy to know ways to do, and to do them. Everything seemed possible, as if the whole stiff-muscled universe could be done things to if only everybody would once say to it: *Our* universe. But now, after his time with Alex, I knew how everything had kind of *tightened*, closed in around him, shot up into high walls. Money, tanneries, big deals by

cable, moonstones from Java, they almost made me slimpse too, and think, What's the use of believing Alex Proudfit and me belong to the same universe? So I guessed how Insley was feeling, ready to believe that he had got showed up to himself in his true light, as a young, emotioning creature who dreams of getting everybody to belong together, and yet can't find no good way. And Alex Proudfit's parting words must of followed him down the drive and out on to the Plank Road: —

"'Take my advice. Don't spend yourself on this blessed little hole. It's dear to me, but it *is* a hole . . . eh? You won't get any thanks for it. Ten to one they'll turn on you if you try to be one of them. Get out of here as soon as possible, and be in the real world! This is just make-believing — and really, you know, you're too fine a sort to throw yourself away like this. Old Nature will take care of the town in good time without you. Trust her!'

"Sometimes something happens to make the world seem different from what we thought it was. Them times catch all of us — when we feel like we'd been let down gentle from some high foot-path where we'd been going along, and instead had been set to walk a hard road in a silence that pointed its finger at us. If we

get really knocked down sudden from a high foot-path, we can most generally pick ourselves up and rally. But when we've been let down gentle by arguments that seem convincing, and by folks that seem to know the world better than we do, then's the time when there ain't much of any rally to us. If we're any good, I s'pose we can climb back without rallying. Rallying gives some spring to the climb, but just straight dog-climbing will get us there, too.

"It was a lovely July night, with June not quite out of the world yet. There was that after-dark light in the sky that makes you feel that the sky is going to stay lit up behind and shining through all night, as if the time was so beautiful that celestial beings must be staying awake to watch it, and to keep the sky lit and turned down low. . . . We walked along the Plank Road pretty still, because I guessed how Insley's own thoughts was conversation enough for him; but when we got a ways down, he kind of reached out with his mind for something and me being near by, his mind clutched at me.

"'What if it *is* so, Miss Marsh?' he says. 'What if the only thing for us to do is to tend to personal morality and an occasional lift to an under dog or two — "if he deserves it." What if that's all — they meant us to do?'

"It's awful hard giving a reason for your chief notions. It's like describing a rose by the tape-measure.

"'Shucks!' I says only. 'Look up at the stars. I don't believe it.'

"He laughed a little, and he did look up at them, but still I knew how he felt. And even the stars that night looked awful detached and able to take care of themselves. And they were a-shining down on the Plank Road that would get to be Daphne Street and go about its business of leading to private homes — *private* homes. The village, that little cluster of lights ahead there, seemed just shutting anybody else out, going its own way, kind of mocking anybody for any idea of getting really inside it. It was plain enough that Insley had nothing to hope for from Alex Proudfit. And Alex's serene sureness that Nature needed nobody to help, his real self-satisfied looking on at processes which no man could really hurry up — my, but they made you feel cheap, and too many of yourself, and like none of you had a license to take a-hold. For a second I caught myself wondering. Maybe Nature — stars and streets and processes — *could* work it out without us.

"Something come against my foot. I pushed at it, and then bent over and touched it. It

was warm and yieldy, and I lifted it up. And it was a puppy that wriggled its body unbelievable and flopped on to my arm its inch and a quarter of tail.

"'Look at,' I says to Insley, which, of course, he couldn't do; but I put the little thing over into his hands.

"'Well, little brother,' says he. 'Running away?'

"We was just in front of the Cadozas', a tumble-down house halfway between Proudfit House and the village. It looked like the puppy might belong there, so we turned in there with it. I'd always sort of dreaded the house, setting in back among lilacs and locusts and never lit up. When I stopped to think of it, I never seemed to remember much about those lilacs and locusts blooming — I suppose they did, but nobody caught them at it often. Some houses you always think of with their lilacs and locusts and wisteria and hollyhocks going all the time; and some you never seem to connect up with being in bloom at all. Some houses you always seem to think of as being lit up to most of their windows, and some you can't call to mind as showing any way but dark. The Cadozas' was one of the unblossoming, dark kind, and awful ramshackle, besides. I

always use' to think it looked like it was waiting for some kind of happening, I didn't know what. And sometimes when I come by there in the dark, I used to think: It ain't happened yet.

"We went around to the back door to rap, and Mis' Cadoza opened it — a slovenly looking woman she is, with no teeth much, and looking like what hair she's got is a burden to her. I remember how she stood there against a background of mussy kitchen that made you feel as if you'd turned something away wrong side out to where it wasn't meant to be looked at.

"'Is it yours, Mis' Cadoza?' I says, Insley holding out the puppy.

"'Murder, it's Patsy,' says Mis' Cadoza. 'Give 'm here — he must of followed Spudge off. Oh, it's you, Miss Marsh.'

"Over by the cook stove in the corner I see past her to something that made me bound to go inside a minute. It was a bed, all frowzy and tumbled, and in it was laying a little boy.

"'Why,' I says, 'I heard Eph was in bed. What's the matter with him?' And I went right in, past his mother, like I was a born guest. She drew off, sort of grudging — she never liked any of us to go there, except when some of them

died, which they was always doing. 'Come in and see Eph, Mr. Insley,' I says, and introduced him.

"The little boy wasn't above eight years old and he wasn't above six years big. . . . He was laying real still, with his arms out of bed, and his little thin hands flat down on the dark covers. His eyes, looking up at us, watching, made me think of some trapped thing.

"'Well, little brother,' says Insley, 'what's the trouble?'

"Mis' Cadoza come and stood at the foot of the bed and jerked at the top covers.

"'I've put him in the bed,' she says, 'because I'm wore out lifting him around. An' I've got the bed out here because I can't trapse back an' forth waitin' on him.'

"'Is he a cripple?' asks Insley, low. I liked so much to hear his voice — it was as if it lifted and lowered itself in his throat without his bothering to tell it which kind it was time to do. And I never heard his voice make a mistake.

"'Cripple?' says Mis' Cadoza, in her kind of undressed voice. 'No. He fell in a tub of hot water years ago, and his left leg is witherin' up.'

"'Let me see it,' says Insley, and pulled the covers back without waiting.

"There ain't nothing more wonderful than a strong, capable, quick human hand doing something it knows how to do. Insley's hands touched over the poor little leg of the child until I expected to see it get well right there under his fingers. He felt the cords of the knee and then looked up at the mother.

"'Haven't they told you,' he says, 'that if he has an operation on his knee, you can have a chance at saving the leg? I knew a case very like this where the leg was saved.'

"'I ain't been to see nobody about it,' says Mis' Cadoza, leaving her mouth open afterwards, like she does. 'What's the good? I can't pay for no operation on him. I got all I can do to keep 'm alive.'

"Eph moved a little, and something fell down on the floor. Mis' Cadoza pounced on it.

"'Ain't I forbid you?' she says, angry, and held out to us what she'd picked up — a little dab of wet earth. 'He digs up all my house plants,' she scolds, like some sort of machinery grating down on one place continual, 'an' he hauls the dirt out and lays there an' makes *figgers*. The idear! Gettin' the sheets a sight. . . .'

"The child looked over at us, defiant. He

spoke for the first time, and I was surprised to hear how kind of grown-up his voice was.

"'I can get 'em to look like faces,' he says. 'I don't care what *she* says.'

"'Show us,' commands Insley.

"He got back the bit of earth from Mis' Cadoza, and found a paper for the crumbs, and pillowed the boy up and sat beside him. The thin, dirty little hands went to work as eager as birds pecking, and on the earth that he packed in his palm he made, with his thumb nail and a pen handle from under his pillow, a face — a boy's face, that had in it something that looked at you. 'But I can never get 'em to look the same way two times,' he says to us, shy.

"'He's most killed my Lady Washington geranium draggin' the clay out from under the roots,' Mis' Cadoza put in, resentful.

"Insley sort of sweeps around and looks acrost at her, deep and gentle, and like he understood about her boy and her geranium considerable better than she did.

"'He won't do it any more,' he says. 'He'll have something better.'

"The boy looked up at him. 'What?' he asks.

"'Clay,' says Insley, 'in a box. With things

for you to make the clay like. Do you want that?'

"The boy kind of curled down in his pillow and come as near to shuffling as he could in the bed, and he hadn't an idea what to say. But I tell you, his eyes, they wasn't like any trapped thing any more; they was regular *boy's* eyes, lit up about something.

"'Mrs. Cadoza,' Insley says, 'will you do something for me? We're trying to get together a little shrubbery, over at the college. May I come in and get some lilac roots from you some day?'

"Mis' Cadoza looked at him — and looked. I don't s'pose it had ever come to her before that anybody would want anything she had or anything she could do.

"'Why, sure,' she says, only. 'Sure, you can, Mr. What's-name.'

"And then Insley put out his hand, and she took it, I noted special. I donno as I ever see anybody shake hands with her before, excep' when somebody was gettin' buried out of her house.

"When we got out on the road again, I noticed that Insley went swinging along so's I could hardly keep up with him; and he done it sort of automatic, and like it was natural

to him. I didn't say anything. If I've learned one thing living out and in among human beings, it's that if you don't do your own keeping still at the right time, nobody else is going to do it for you. He spoke up after a minute like I thought he would; and he spoke up buoyant — kind of a reverent buoyant:—

"'I don't believe we're discharged from the universe, after all,' he says, and laughed a little. 'I believe we've still got our job.'

"I looked 'way down the Plank Road, on its way to its business of being Daphne Street, and it come to me that neither the one nor the other stopped in Friendship Village. But they led on out, down past the wood lots and the Pump pasture and across the tracks and up the hill, and right off into that sky that somebody was keeping lit up and turned down low. And I said something that I'd thought before:

"'Ain't it,' I says, 'like sometimes everybody in the world come and stood right close up beside of you, and spoke through the walls of you for something inside of you to come out and be there with them?'

"'That's it,' he says, only. 'That's it.' But I see his mind nipped onto what mine meant, and tied it in the right place.

"When we got to Mis' Emmons's corner, I

turned off from Daphne Street to go that way, because I'd told her I'd look in that night and see what they'd bought in town. It was late, for the village, but Mis' Emmons never minded that. The living-room light was showing through the curtains, and Insley, saying good night to me, looked towards the windows awful wistful. I guessed why. It was part because he felt as if he must see Robin Sidney and they must talk over together what Alex Proudfit had said to him. And part it was just plain because he wanted to see her again.

"'Why don't you come in a minute,' I says, 'and ask after Christopher? Then you can see me home.'

"'Wouldn't they mind it being late?' he asks.

"I couldn't help smiling at that. Once Mis' Emmons had called us all up by telephone at ten o'clock at night to invite us to her house two days later. She explained afterwards that she hadn't looked at the clock for a week, but if she had, she might have called us just the same. 'For my life,' she says, 'I *can't* be afraid of ten o'clock. Indeed, I rather like it.' I told him this, while we was walking in from her gate.

"'Mrs. Emmons,' he says, when she come to the door, 'I've come because I hear that you

like ten o'clock, and so do I. I wanted to ask if you've ever been able to make it last?'

"'No,' she says. 'I prefer a new one every night — and this one to-night is an exceptionally good one.'

"She always answered back so pretty. I feel glad when folks can. It's like they had an extra brain to 'em.

"Insley went in, and he sort of filled up the whole room, the way some men do. He wasn't so awful big, either. But he was pervading. Christopher had gone to bed, and Robin Sidney was sitting there near a big crock of hollyhocks — she could make the centre and life of a room a crock full of flowers just as you can make it a fireplace.

"'Come in,' she says, 'and see what we bought Christopher. I wanted to put him in black velvet knickerbockers or silver armour, but Aunt Eleanor has bought chiefly khaki middies. She's such a sensible relative.'

"'What are we going to do with him?' Insley asks. I loved the way he always said 'we' about everything. Not 'they' or 'you,' but always, 'What are *we* going to do.'

"'I'll keep him awhile,' Mis' Emmons says, 'and see what develops. If I weren't going to Europe this fall — but something may happen.

Things do. Calliope,' she says to me, 'did I buy what I ought to have bought?'

"I went over to see the things spread out on the table, and Insley turned round to where Robin was. I don't really believe he had been very far away from where she was since the night before, when Christopher come. And he got right into what he had to say, like he was impatient for the sympathy in her eyes and in her voice.

"'I must tell you,' he says. 'I could hardly wait to tell you. Isn't it great to be knocked down and picked up again, without having to get back on your own feet. I — wanted to tell you.'

"'Tell me,' she says. And she looked at him in her nice, girl way that lent him her eyes in good faith for just a minute and then took them back again.

"'I've been to see Alex Proudfit,' he said. 'I've dined with him.'

"I don't think she said anything at all, but Insley went on, absorbed in what he was saying.

"'I talked with him,' he says, 'about what we talked of last night — the things to do, here in the village. I thought he might care — I was foolish enough for that. Have you ever tried to open a door in a solid wall? When

I left there, I felt as if I'd tried just that. Seriously, have you ever tried to talk about the way things are going to be and to talk about it to a perfectly satisfied man?'

"Robin leaned forward, but I guess he thought that was because of her sympathy. He went right on:—

"'I want never to speak of this to anyone else, but I can't help telling you. You—understand. You know what I'm driving at. Alex Proudfit is a good man—as men are counted good. And he's a perfect host, a fascinating companion. But he's a type of the most dangerous selfishness that walks the world—'

"Robin suddenly laid her hand, just for a flash, on Insley's arm.

"'You mustn't tell me,' she says. 'I ought to have told you before. Alex Proudfit—I'm going to be Alex Proudfit's wife.'

V

"In the next days things happened that none of us Friendship Village ladies is likely ever to forget. Some of the things was nice and some was exciting, and some was the kind that's nice after you've got the introduction wore off; but all of them was memorable. And most all of them was the kind that when you're on the train looking out the car window, or when you're home sitting in the dusk before it's time to light the lamp, you fall to thinking about and smiling over, and you have them always around with you, same as heirlooms you've got ready for yourself.

"One of these was the Fourth of July that year. It fell a few days after Alex Proudfit come, and the last of the days was full of his guests arriving to the house party. The two Proudfit cars was racking back and forth to the station all day long, and Jimmy Sturgis, he went near crazy with getting the baggage up. I never see such a lot of baggage. 'Land, land,' says Mis' Toplady, peeking out her window at it, 'you'd think they was all trees and they'd

come bringing extra sets of branches, regular forest size.' Mis' Emmons and Robin and Christopher went up the night before the Fourth — Mis' Emmons was going to do the chaperoning, and Alex had asked me to be up there all I could to help him. He knows how I love to have a hand in things. However, I couldn't be there right at first, because getting ready for the Fourth of July was just then in full swing.

"Do you know what it is to want to do over again something that you ain't done for years and years? I don't care what it is — whether it's wanting to be back sitting around the dinner table of your home when you was twelve, and them that was there aren't there now; or whether it's rocking in the cool of the day on the front porch of some old house that got tore down long ago; or whether it's walking along a road you use' to know every fence post of; or fishing from a stream that's dried up or damned these twenty years; or eating spice' currants or pickle' peaches that there aren't none put up like them now; or hearing a voice in a glee club that don't sing no more, or milking a dead cow that *wasn't* dead on the spring mornings you mean about — no, sir, I don't care what one of them all it happens to be, if you know what it is to want to do it again and can't, 'count of death and dis-

tance and long-ago-ness, then I tell you you know one of the lonesomest, hurtingest feelings the human heart can, sole outside of the awful things. And that was what had got the matter with me awhile ago.

"It had come on me in the meeting of townspeople called by Silas Sykes a few weeks before, to discuss how Friendship Village should celebrate the Fourth. We hadn't had a Fourth in the village in years. Seeing the Fourth and the Cemetery was so closely connected, late years, Sodality had took a hand in the matter and had got fire-crackers and pistols voted out of town, part by having family fingers blowed off and clothes scorched full of holes, and part through Silas and the other dealers admitting they wan't no money in the stuff and they'd be glad to be prevented by law from having to sell it. So we shut down on it the year after little Spudge Cadoza bit down on a cap to see if it'd go off, and it done so. But we see we'd made the mistake of not hatching up something to take the place of the noise, because the boys and girls all went off to the next-town Fourths and come home blowed up and scorched off, anyway. And some of the towns, especially Red Barns, that we can see from Friendship Village when it's clear, was feeling awful touchy and chip-

shouldered towards us, and their two weekly papers was saying we borrowed our year's supply of patriotism off the county, and sponged on public spirit, and like that. So the general Friendship feeling was that we'd ought to have a doings this year, and Postmaster Sykes, that ain't so much public spirited as he is professional leading citizen,— platform introducer of all visiting orators and so on,— he called a mass-meeting to decide what to do.

"Mis' Sykes, she was awful interested, too, through being a born leader and up in arms most of the time to do something new. And this year she was anxious to get up something fancy to impress her niece with — the new niece that was coming to visit her, and that none of us had ever see, and that the Sykes's themselves had only just developed. Seems she was looking for her family tree and she wrote to Mis' Sykes about being connect'. And the letter seemed so swell, and the address so mouth-melting and stylish that Mis' Sykes up and invited her to Friendship Village to look herself up in their Bible, Born and Died part.

"The very night of that public mass-meeting Miss Beryl Sessions — such was the niece's name — come in on the Through, and Mis' Sykes, she snapped her up from the supper table to bring

her to the meeting and show her off, all brimming with the blood-is-thicker-than-water sentiments due to a niece that looked like that. For I never see sweller. And being in the Glee Club I set where I got a good view when Mis' Sykes rustled into the meeting, last minute, in her best black cashmere, though it was an occasion when the rest of us would wear our serges and alapacas, and Mis' Sykes knew it. All us ladies see them both and took in every stitch they had on without letting on to unpack a glance, and we see that the niece was wearing the kind of a dress that was to ours what mince-pie is to dried apple, and I couldn't blame Mis' Sykes for showing her off, human.

"Silas had had Dr. June open the meeting with prayer, and I can't feel that this was so much reverence in Silas as that he isn't real parliamentary nor yet real knowledgeable about what to do with his hands, and prayer sort of broke the ice for him. That's the way Silas is.

"'Folks,' says he, 'we're here to consider the advisability of bein' patriotic this year. Of having a doings that'll shame the other towns around for their half-an'-half way of giving things. Of making the glorious Fourth a real business bringer. Of having a speech that'll bring in the country trade — the Honourable

Thaddeus Hyslop has been named by some. And of getting our city put in the class of the wide awake and the hustlers and the up-to-date and doing. It's a grand chance we've passed up for years. What are we going to do for ourselves this year? To decide it is the purpose of this mass-meetin'. Sentiments are now in order.'

"Silas set down with a kitterin' glance to his new niece that he was host and uncle of and pleased to be put in a good light before, first thing so.

"Several men hopped up — Timothy Toplady saying that Friendship Village was a city in all but name and numbers, and why not prove it to the other towns? Jimmy Sturgis that takes tintypes, besides running the 'bus and was all primed for a day full of both — 'A glorious Fourth,' says he, 'would be money in our pockets.' And the farm machinery and furniture dealers, and Gekerjeck, that has the drug store and the ice-cream fountain, and others, they spoke the same. Insley had to be to the college that night, or I don't believe the meeting would have gone the way it did go. For the first line and chorus of everything that all the men present said never varied: —

"'The Fourth for a business bringer.'

"It was Threat Hubbelthwait that finally made the motion, and he wasn't real sober, like he usually ain't, but he wound up on the key-note:—

"'I sold two hundred and four lunches the last Fourth we hed in Friendship Village,' says he, pounding his palm with his fist, 'an' I move you that we celebrate this comin' Fourth like the blazes.'

"And though Silas softened it down some in putting it, still that was substantially the sentiment that went through at that mass-meeting, that was real pleased with itself because of.

"Well, us ladies hadn't taken no part. It ain't our custom to appear much on our feet at public gatherings, unless to read reports of a year's work, and so that night we never moved a motion. But we looked at each other, and us ladies has got so we understand each other's eyebrows. And we knew, one and all, that we was ashamed of the men and ashamed of their sentiments. But the rest didn't like to speak out, 'count of being married to them. And I didn't like to, 'count of not being.

"But when they got to discussing ways and means of celebrating, a woman did get onto her feet, and a little lilt of interest run round the

room like wind. It was Miss Beryl Sessions, the niece, that stood up like you'd unwrapped your new fashion magazine and unrolled her off'n the front page.

"'I wonder,' says she — and her voice went all sweet and chirpy and interested, 'whether it would amuse you to know some ways we took to celebrate the Fourth of July last year at home . . .' and while the men set paying attention to her appearance and thinking they was paying attention to her words alone, she went on to tell them how 'at home' the whole town had joined in a great, Fourth of July garden party on the village 'common,' with a band and lanterns and fireworks at night, and a big marquee in the middle, full of ice-cream. We made it,' she wound up, 'a real social occasion, a town party with everybody invited. And the business houses said that it paid them over and over.'

"Well, of course that went with the men. Land, but men is easy tamed, so be the tameress is somebody they ain't used to and is gifted with a good dress and a kind of a 'scalloped air. But when she also has some idea of business they go down and don't know it. 'Why, I should think that'd take here like a warm meal,' says Timothy Toplady, instant — and I see Mis' Amanda Toplady's chin come home to place like she'd

heard Timothy making love to another woman. 'Novel as the dickens,' says Simon Gekerjeck. 'Move we adopt it.' And so they done.

"While they was appointing committees I set up there in the Glee Club feeling blacker and blacker. Coming down to the meeting that night, I recollect I'd been extra gentle in my mind over the whole celebration idea. Walking along in the seven-o'clock light, with the sun shining east on Daphne Street and folks all streaming to the town-meeting, and me sensing what it was going to be for, I'd got all worked up to 'most a Declaration of Independence lump in my throat. When I went in the door to the meeting, little Spudge Cadoza and some other children was hanging around the steps and Silas Sykes was driving them away; and it come to me how deathly ridiculous that was, to be driving *children* away from a meeting like that, when children is what such meetings is for; and I'd got to thinking of all the things Insley was hoping for us, and I'd been real lifted up on to places for glory. And here down had come the men with their talk about a *paying* Fourth, and here was Miss Beryl Sessions showing us how to celebrate in a way that seemed to me real sweet but not so very patriotic. It was then that all of a sudden it

seemed to me I'd die, because I wanted so much to feel the way I'd use to feel when it was going to be the Fourth o' July. And when they sung 'Star Spangled Banner' to go home on and all stood up to the sentiment, I couldn't open my mouth. I can't go folks that stands up and carols national tunes and then talks about having a Fourth that'll be a real business bringer.

"'What'd you think of the meeting?' says Mis' Toplady, low, to me on the way out.

"'I think,' says I, frank, 'it was darn.'

"'There's just exactly what we all think,' says Mis' Toplady, in a whisper.

"But all the same, preparations was gone into head first. Most of us was put on to from one to five committees — I mean most of them that works. The rest of the town was setting by, watching it be done for them, serene or snarling, according to their lights. Of course us ladies worked, not being them that goes to a meeting an' sets with their mouths shut and then comes out and kicks at what the meetin' done. Yet, though we wan't made out of that kind of meal, we spoke our minds to each other, private.

"'What under the canopy *is* a marquee?' asks Mis' Amanda Toplady, when we met at her house to plan about refreshments.

"Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss spoke right up.

"'Why, it's a finger ring,' she says. 'One of them with stones running the long way. The minister's wife's got a blue stone one. . . .'

"'Finger ring!' says Mis' Mayor Uppers, scornful. 'It's a title. That's what it is. From England.'

"We looked at them both, perplexish. Mis' Holcomb is always up on things — it was her that went into short sleeves when the rest of us was still crocheting cuff turnovers, unconscious as the dead. But Mis' Uppers had been the Mayor's wife, and though he'd run away, 'count o' some money matter, still a title is a title, an' we thought Mis' Uppers had ought to know.

"Then Abagail Arnold, that keeps the home bakery, she spoke up timid. 'I see,' she says, 'in the *Caterer's Gazette* a picture called "Marquee Decorated for Fête." The picture wan't nothing but a striped tent. Could a tent have anything to do with it?'

"'Pity sakes, no,' says Mis' Uppers. 'This is somethin' real city done, Abagail.'

"We worked on what we could, but we all felt kind of lost and left out of it, and like we was tinkering with tools we didn't know the names

of and a-making something we wasn't going to know how to use. And when the article about our Fourth flared out in the *Friendship Daily* and Red Barns and Indian Mound weeklies, we felt worse than we had before: 'Garden Party.' 'All Day Fête.' '*Al Fresco* Celebration,' the editors had wrote it up.

"'All *what?*' says Mis' Uppers, listening irritable to the last one. 'I can't catch that word no more'n a rabbit.'

"'It's a French word,' Mis' Holcomb told her, superior. 'Seems to me I've heard it means a failure. It's a funny way to put it, ain't it? I bet, though, that's what it'll be.'

"But the men, my, the men thought they was doing things right. The Committee on Orator, with Silas for rudder, had voted itself Fifty Dollars to squander on the speech, and they had engaged the Honourable Thaddeus Hyslop, that they'd hoped to, and that was formerly in our legislature, to be the orator of the day; they put up a platform and seats on the 'common' — that wan't nothing but the market where loads of wood stood to be sold; they was a-going to cut evergreens and plant them there for the day; the Committee on Fireworks was a-going to buy set pieces for the evening; they was a-going to raise Ned. Somebody that was on

one of the committees wanted to have some sort of historic scenes, but the men wouldn't hear to it, because that would take away them that had to do the business in the stores; no caluthumpians, no grand basket dinner — just the garden party, real sweet, with Miss Beryl Sessions and a marquee full of ice-cream that the ladies was to make.

"It sounds sort of sacrilegious to me,' says Mis' Holcomb, 'connectin' the Fourth up with society and secular doin's. When I was young, my understandin' of a garden party would of been somethin' worldly. Now it seems it's patriotic. Well, I wonder how it's believed to be in the sight of the Lord?'

"But whether it was right or whether it was wrong, none of it rung like it had ought to of rang. They wan't no *glow* to it. We all went around like getting supper on wash-day, and not like getting up a meal for folks that meant a lot to us. It wan't going to be any such Fourth as I'd meant about and wanted to have come back. The day come on a pacing, and the nearer it come, the worse all us ladies felt. And by a few days before it, when our final committee meeting come off in Abagail Arnold's home bakery, back room, 'count of being central, we was all blue as the grave, and I donno but

bluer. We set waiting for Silas that was having a long-distance call, and Abagail was putting in the time frosting dark cakes in the same room. We was most all there but the niece Miss Beryl Sessions. She had gone home, but she was coming back on the Fourth in an automobile full o' city folks.

"'The *marquee's* come,' says Mis' Holcomb, throwing out the word clickish.

"Nobody said anything. Seems it *was* a tent all along.

"'Silas has got in an extra boy for the day,' says Mis' Sykes, complacent. 'It's the littlest Cadoza boy, Spudge. He's goin' to walk up an' down Daphne Street all day, with a Prize Coffee board on his back.'

"'Where's Spudge's Fourth comin' in?' I couldn't help askin'.

"Mis' Sykes stared. She always could look you down, but she's got a much flatter, thicker stare since her niece come. 'What's them kind o' folks *for* but such work?' says she, puckering.

"'Oh, I donno, I donno,' says I. 'I thought mebbe they was partly made to thank the Lord for bein' born free.'

"'How unpractical you talk, Calliope,' she says.

"'I donno that word,' says I, reckless from being pent up. 'But it seems like a liberty-lovin' people had ought to hev *one* day to love liberty on an' not tote groceries and boards and such.'

"'*Don't it!*' says Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss, explosive.

"'What you talking?' says Mis' Sykes, cold. 'Don't you know the Fourth of July can be made one of the best days of the year for your own town's good? What's that if it ain't patriotic?'

"'It's Yankee shrewd,' says I, snapping some, 'that's what it is. It ain't Yankee spirited, by a long shot.'

"'"*By a long shot,*"' quotes Mis' Sykes, withering. She always was death on wording, and she was far more death after her niece come. But I always thought, and I think now, that correcting your advisary's grammar is like telling him there's a smooch on his nose, and they ain't either of them parliamental *or* decent.

"Mis' Uppers sighed. 'The whole thing,' says she, candid, 'sounds to me like Fourth o' July in Europe or somewheres. No get-up-an'-get anywheres to it. What do they do in Europe on the Fourth o' July, anyway?' she wondered. 'I donno's I ever read.'

"'I donno, either,' says Mis' Holcomb, dark, 'but I bet you it's one of these All Frost celebrations — or whatever it is they say.'

"Mis' Toplady set drying her feet by Abagail's stove, and she looked regular down in the mouth. 'Well, sir,' she said, 'a Fourth o' July all rosettes an' ribbin's so don't sound to me one bit like the regular Fourth at all. It don't sound to me no more'n the third — or the fifth.'

"I was getting that same homesick feeling that I'd had off and on all through the getting ready, that hankering for the old kinds of Fourths of Julys when I was a little girl. When us girls had a quarter apiece to spend, and father'd cover the quarter with his hands on the gate-post for us to guess them; and when the boys picked up scrap-iron and sold old rubbers to get their Fourth money. It wan't so much what we used to do that I wanted back as it was the *feeling*. Why, none of our spines use' to be laid down good and flat in our backs once all day long. And I wisht what I'd wisht more than once since the mass-meeting, that some of us ladies had of took hold of that Fourth and had run it so's 'twould of been like you mean 'way inside when you say 'The Fourth of July' — and that death and distance and long-ago-ness is awful in the way of.

"'We'd ought to of had a grand basket dinner in the Depot Woods,' I says, restless.

"'An' a p'rade,' says Mis' Toplady. 'I donno nothin' that makes me feel more patriotic than the minute before the p'rade comes by.'

"'An' children in the Fourth somehow,' Mis' Uppers says. 'Land, children is who it's for, anyhow,' she says, like I'd been thinking; 'an' all we've ever done for 'em about it is to leave 'em kill 'emselves with it.'

"Well, it was there, just there, and before Mis' Sykes could dicker a reply that in come tearing her husband from his long-distance telephoning, and raced into the room like he hadn't a manner in his kit.

"'We're all over with,' Silas shouts. 'It's all done for! Thaddeus Hyslop is smashed an' bleedin'. He can't come. We ain't got no speech. His automobile's turned over on top of his last speakin' place. Everybody else that ain't one-horse is sure to be got for somewheres else. Our Fourth of July is rooned. We're done for. The editor's gettin' it in the *Weekly* so's to warn the county. We'll be the Laughing Stock. Dang the luck!' says Silas; 'why don't some o' you say somethin'?'

"But it wasn't all because Silas was doing it all that the men didn't talk, because when he'd

stopped, they all stood there with their mouths open and never said a word. Seems to me I did hear Timothy Toplady bring out, 'Blisterin' Benson,' but nobody offered nothing more fertile. That is, nobody of the men did. But 'most before I got my thoughts together I heard two feet of a chair come down onto the floor, and Mis' Amanda Toplady stood up there by Abagail's cook stove, and she took the griddle lifter and struck light on the side of the pipe.

"'Hurrah!' she says. 'Now we can have a real Fourth. A Fourth that does as a Fourth is.'

"'What you talkin', Amanda Toplady?' says Silas, crisp; and ''Mandy, what the blazes do you mean?' says Timothy, her lawful lord. But Mis' Toplady didn't mind them, nor mind Mis' Sykes, that was staring at her flat and thick.

"'I mean,' says Mis' Toplady, reckless, 'I been sick to death of the idea of a Fourth with no spirit to it. I mean I been sick to death of a Fourth that's all starched white dresses an' company manners an' no hurrahs anywheres about it. An' us ladies, most all of us, feels the same. We didn't like to press in, bein' you men done the original plannin', an' so not one of us has said "P'rade," nor nothin' else to you. But now that your orator has fell through on himself, you men just leave us ladies in on this

thing to do more'n take orders, an' you needn't be the Laughin' Stock o' nothin' an' nobody. I guess you'll all stand by me. What say, ladies?'

"Well, sir, you'd ought to of heard us. We joined in like a patch of grasshoppers singing. They wasn't one of us that hadn't been dying to get our hands on that Fourth and make it a Fourth full of unction and oil of joy, like the Bible said, and must of meant what we meant.

"'Oh, ladies,' I remember I says, fervent, 'I feel like we could make a Fourth o' July just like stirrin' up a white cake, so be we was let.'

"'What d' you know about managin' a Fourth?' snarls Silas. 'You'll have us all in the hole. You'll have us shellin' out of our own pockets to make up—'

"Mis' Toplady whirled on him. 'Would you druther have Red Barns an' Indian Mound a-jumpin' on you through the weekly press for bein' bluffers, an' callin' us cheap an' like that, or would you druther not?' she put it to him.

"'Dang it,' says Silas, 'I never tried to do a thing for this town that it didn't lay down an' roll all over me. I wish I was dead.'

"'You wan't tryin' to do this thing for this town,' says Mis' Toplady back at him, like the wind. 'You was tryin' to do it for the *stores* of

this town, an' you know it. You was tryin' to ride the Fourth for a horse to the waterin' trough o' good business, an' you know it, Silas Sykes,' says she, 'an' so was Jimmy and Threat an' all of you. The hull country tries to get behind the Fourth of July an' make money over its back like a counter. It ain't what was meant, an' us ladies felt it all along. An' neither was it meant for a garden party day alone, though *that*,' says Mis' Toplady, gracious, 'is a real sweet side idea. An' Mis' Sykes an' Mis' Sessions had ought to go on an' run that part of it, bein' the — tent's here,' she could *not* bring herself to use that other word. 'But,' she says, 'that ain't all of a real Fourth, nor yet a speech ain't, though he did use to be in the legislature. Them things alone don't make a real flag, liberty-praisin' Fourth, to me nor to none of us.'

"'Well,' says Silas, sour, 'what you goin' to *do* if the men decides to let you try this?'

"'That ain't the way,' says Mis' Toplady, like a flash; 'it ain't for the men to *let us do* nothin'. It's for us all to do it together, yoke to yoke, just like everything else ought to be done by us both, an' no talk o' "*runnin'*" by either side.'

"'But what's the idee — what's the idee?'

says Silas. 'Dang it all, somebody's got to hev an idee.'

"'Us ladies has got 'em,' says Mis' Toplady, calm. 'An',' says she, 'one o' the first of 'em is that if we have anything to do with runnin' the Fourth of our forefathers, then after 10 A.M., all day on that day, every business house in town has got to shut down.'

"'What?' says Silas, his voice slippin'. 'Gone crazy-headed, hev ye?'

"'No, Silas,' says Mis' Toplady, 'nor yet hev we gone so graspin' that we can't give up a day's trade to take notice of our country.'

"'Lord Harry,' says Silas, 'you can't get a dealer in town to do it, an' you know it.'

"'Oh, yes, you can, Silas,' says somebody, brisk. And it was Abagail, frosting dark cakes over by the side of the room. 'I was goin' to shut up shop, anyway, all day on the Fourth,' Abagail says.

"'An' lose the country trade in lunches?' yells Silas. 'Why, woman, you'd be Ten Dollars out o' pocket.'

"'I wan't never one to spend the mornin' thankin' God an' the afternoon dippin' oysters,' says Abagail. And Silas scrunched. He done that one year when his Thanksgiving oysters come late, and he knew he done it.

"Well, they went over it and over it and tried to think of some other way, and tried to hatch up some other speaker without eating up the whole Fifty Dollars in telephone tolls, and tried most other things. And then we told them what we'd thought of different times, amongst us as being features fit for a Fourth in the sight of the Lord and the sight of men. And they hemmed and they hawed and they give in about as graceful as a clothes-line winds up when you've left it out in the sleet, but they did give in and see reason. Timothy last — that's quite vain of being firm.

"'If we come out with a one-horse doin's, seem's like it'd be worse than sittin' down flat-foot failed,' he mourns, grieving.

"Amanda, his wife, give him one of her looks. 'Timothy,' says she, 'when, since you was married to me, did I ever fail to stodge up a company dinner or a spare bed or a shroud when it was needed sudden? When did any of us ladies ever fail that's here? Do you sp'ose we're any more scant of idees about our own nation?'

"And Timothy had to keep his silence. He knew what she said was the Old Testament truth. But I think what really swung them all round was the thought of Red Barns and

Indian Mound. Imagination of what them two weekly papers would say, so be we petered out on our speech and didn't offer nothing else, was too much for flesh and blood to bear. And the men ended by agreeing to seeing to shutting every business house in Friendship Village and they went off to do it, — resolved, but groaning some, like men will.

"Mis' Sykes, she made some excuse and went, too. 'I'll run the garden party part,' says she. 'My niece an' I'll do that, an' try our best to get some novelty into your Fourth. An' we'll preside on the marquee, like we'd agreed. More I don't say.'

"But the rest of us, we stayed on there at Abagail's, and we planned like mad.

"We didn't look in no journal nor on no woman's page for something new. We didn't rush to our City relations for novelties. We didn't try for this and that nor grasp at no agony whatever. We just went down deep into the inside of our understanding and thought what the Fourth was and how them that made it would of wanted it kept. No fingers blowed off nor clothes scorched up, no houses burned down, no ear-drums busted out — none of them would of been in *their* programme, and they wan't in ours. Some of the things that

was in ours we'd got by hearing Insley tell what they was doin' other places. Some o' the things he suggested to us. Some o' the things we got by just going back and back down the years an' *remembering* — not so much what we'd done as the way we use' to feel, long ago, when the Fourth was the Fourth and acted like it knew it. Some of the things we got by just reaching forward and forward, and seeing what the Fourth is going to mean to them a hundred years from now — so be we do our part. And some of the things we got through sheer make-shift woman intelligence, that put its heads together and used everything it had, that had anything to do with the nation, or the town, or with really living at all the way that first Fourth of July meant about, 'way down inside.

"Before it was light on the morning of the Fourth, I woke up, feeling all happy and like I wanted to hurry. I was up and dressed before the sun was up, and when I opened my front door, I declare it was just like the glory of the Lord was out there waiting for me. The street was laying all still and simple, like it was ready and waiting for the light. Early as it was, Mis' Holcomb was just shaking her breakfast table-cloth on her side stoop, and she waved it to me, big and billowy and white,

like a banner. And I offs with my apron and waved it back, and it couldn't of meant no more to either of us if we had been shaking out the folds of flags. It was too early for the country wagons to be rattling in yet, and they wan't no other sounds — except a little bit of a pop now and then over to where Bennie Uppers and little Nick Toplady was up and out, throwing torpedoes onto the bricks; and then the birds that was trilling an' shouting like mad, till every tree all up and down Daphne Street and all up and down the town and the valley was just one living singing. And all over everything, like a kind of a weave to it, was that something that makes a Sunday morning and some holiday mornings better and sweeter and *goldener* than any other day. I ain't got much of a garden, not having any real time to fuss in it, but I walked out into the middle of the little patch of pinks and parsley that I have got, and I says 'way deep in me, deeper than thinking: 'It don't make no manner of differ'nce how much of a fizzle the day ends up with, this, here and now, is the way it had ought to start.'

"Never, not if I live till beyond always, will I forget how us ladies' hearts was in our mouths when, along about 'leven o'clock, we heard the

Friendship Village Stonehenge band coming fifing along, and we knew the parade was begun. We was all on the market square — hundreds of us, seems though. Red Barns and Indian Mound had turned out from side to side of themselves, mingling the same as though ploughshares was pruning-hooks — or whatever that quotation time is — both towns looking for flaws in the day, like enough, but both shutting up about it, biblical. Even the marquee, with its red and white stripes, showing through the trees, made me feel good. 'Land, land,' Mis' Toplady says, 'it looks kind of homey and old-fashioned, after all, don't it? I mean the — tent,' she says — she would *not* say the other word; but then I guess it made her kind of mad seeing Mis' Sykes bobbing around in there in white duck an' white shoes — her that ain't a grandmother sole because of Nature and not at all through any lack of her own years. Everything was all seeming light and confident — but I tell you we didn't feel so confident as we'd meant to when we heard the band a-coming to the tune o' 'Hail, Columbia! Happy Land.' And yet now, when I look back on that Independence Day procession, it seems like regular floats is no more than toy doings beside of it.

"What do you guess us ladies had thought up for our procession, — with Insley back of us, letting us think we thought it up alone? Mebbe you'll laugh, because it wan't expensive to do; but oh, I think it was nice. We'd took everything in the town that done the town's work, and we'd run them all together. We headed off with the fire-engine, 'count of the glitter — and we'd loaded it down with flags and flowers, and the hook and ladder and hose-carts the same, wheels and sides; and flags in the rubber caps of the firemen up top. Then we had the two big sprinkling carts, wound with bunting, and five-foot flags flying from the seats. Then come all the city teams drawn by the city horses — nice, plump horses they was, and rosettes on them, and each man had decorated his wagon and was driving it in his best clothes. Then come the steam roller that Friendship Village and Red Barns and Indian Mound owns together and scraps over some, though that didn't appear in its appearance, puffing along, with posies on it. Then there was the city electric light repair wagon, with a big paper globe for an umbrella, and the electric men riding with their leggings on and their spurs, like they climb the poles; and behind them the telephone men was riding —

because the town owns its own telephone, too — and then the four Centrals, in pretty shirt-waists, in a double-seated buggy loaded with flowers — the telephone office we'd see to it was closed down, too, to have its Fourth, like a human being. And marching behind them was the city waterworks men, best bib and tucker apiece. And then we hed out the galvanized garbage wagon that us ladies hed bought ourselves a year ago, and that wasn't being used this year count of the city pleading too poison poor; and it was all scrubbed up and garnished and filled with ferns and drove by its own driver and the boy that had use' to go along to empty the cans. And then of course they was more things — some of them with day fireworks shooting up from them — but not the hearse, though we had all we could do to keep Timothy Toplady from having it in, 'count of its common public office.

"Well, and then we'd done an innovation — an' this was all Insley's idea, and it was him that made us believe we could do it. Coming next, in carriages and on foot, was the mayor and the city council and every last man or woman that had anything to do with running the city life. They was all there — city treasurer, clerk of the court, register of deeds, sheriffs, marshals,

night-watchmen, health officer, postmaster, janitor of the city hall, clerks, secretaries, stenographers, school board, city teachers, and every one of the rest — they was all there, just like they had belonged in the p'rade the way them framers of the first Fourth of July had meant they should fit in: Conscience and all. But some of them servants of the town had made money off'n its good roads, and some off'n its saloons, and some off'n getting ordinances repealed, and some off'n inspecting buildings and sidewalks that they didn't know nothing about, and some was making it even then by paving out into the marsh; and some in yet other ways that wasn't either real elbow work nor clean head work. What else could they do? We'd ask' them to march because they represented the town, and rather'n own they *didn't* represent the town, there they was marching; but if some of them didn't step down Daphne Street feeling green and sick and sore and right down schoolboy ashamed of themselves, then they ain't got the human thrill in them that somehow I *cannot* believe ever dies clear out of nobody. They was a lump in my throat for them that had sold themselves, and they was a lump for them that hadn't — but oh, the differ'nce in the lumps.

"'Land, land,' I says to Mis' Toplady, 'if we ain't done another thing, we've made 'em remember they're servants to Friendship Village — like they often forget.'

"'Ain't we?' she says, solemn. 'Ain't we?'

"And then next behind begun the farm things: the threshin' machines and reapers and binders and mowers and like that, all drawn by the farm horses and drove by their owners and decorated by them, jolly and gay; and, too, all the farm horses for miles around — we was going to give a donated surprise prize for the best kep' and fed amongst them. And last, except for the other two bands sprinkled along, come the leading citizens, and who do you guess *they* was? Not Silas nor Timothy nor Eppleby nor even Doctor June, nor our other leading business men and our three or four professionals — no, not them; but the real, true, leading citizens of Friendship Village and Indian Mound and Red Barns and other towns and the farms between — the *children*, over two hundred of them, dressed in white if they had it and in dark if they didn't, with or without shoes, in rags or out of them, village-tough descended or with pew-renting fathers, all the same and together, and carrying a flag and singing to the tops of their voices 'Hail, Columbia,'

that the bands kept a-playing, some out of plumb as to time, but all fervent and joyous. It was us women alone that got up that part. My, I like to think about it.

"They swung the length of Daphne Street and twice around the market square, and they come to a halt in front of the platform. And Doctor June stood up before them all, and he prayed like this: —

"'Lord God, that let us start free an' think we was equal, give us to help one another to be free an' to get equal, in deed an' in truth.'

"And who do you s'pose we hed to read the Declaration of Independence? Little Spudge Cadoza, that Silas had been a-going to hev walk up and down Daphne Street with a board on his back — Insley thought of him, and we picked him out a-purpose. And though he didn't read it so thrilling as Silas would of, it made me feel the way no reading of it has ever made me feel before — oh, because it was kind of like we'd snapped up the little kid and set him free all over again, even though he wasn't it but one day in the year. And it sort of seemed to me that all inside the words he read was trumpets and horns telling how much them words was *going* to mean to him and his kind before he'd had time to die. And then the

Glee Club struck into 'America,' and the whole crowd joined in without being expected, and the three bands that was laying over in the shade hopped up and struck in, too — and I bet they could of heard us to Indian Mound. Leastways to Red Barns, that we can see from Friendship Village when it's clear.

"The grand basket dinner in the Depot Woods stays in my head as one picture, all full of veal loaf and 'scalloped potato and fruit salad and nut-bread and deviled eggs and bake' beans and pickle' peaches and layer cake and drop sponge-cake and hot coffee — the kind of a dinner that comes crowding to your thought whenever you think 'Dinner' at your hungriest. And after we'd took care of everybody's baskets and set them under a tree for a lunch towards six, us ladies went back to the market square. And over by the marquee we see the men gathered — all but Insley, that had slipped away as quick as we begun telling him how much of it was due to him. Miss Beryl Sessions had just arrived, in a automobile, covered with veils, and she was introducing the other men to her City friends. Us ladies sort of kittered around back of them, not wanting to press ourselves forward none, and we went up to the door of the marquee where, behind the

refreshment table, Mis' Sykes was a-standing in her white duck.

"'My,' says Mis' Holcomb to her, 'it's all going off nice so far, ain't it?'

"'They ain't a great deal the matter with it,' says Mis' Sykes, snappy.

"'Why, Mis' Sykes,' says Mis' Uppers, grieving, 'the parade an' the basket dinner seemed to me both just perfect.'

"'The parade done well enough,' says Mis' Sykes, not looking at her. 'I donno much about the dinner.'

"And all of a sudden we recollected that she hadn't been over to the grand basket dinner at all.

"'Why, Mis' Sykes,' says Mis' Toplady, blank, 'ain't you et nothin'?'

"'My niece,' says Mis' Sykes, dignified, 'didn't get here till now. Who was I to leave in the *tent?* I've et,' says she, cold, 'two dishes of ice-cream an' two chocolate nut-cakes.'

"Mis' Toplady just swoops over towards her. 'Why, my land,' she says, hearty, 'they's stuff an' to spare packed over there under the trees. You go right on over and get your dinner. Poke right into any of our baskets — ours is grouped around mine that's tied with

a red bandanna to the handle. And leave us tend the marquee. What say, ladies?'

"And I don't think she even sensed she used that name.

"When she'd gone, I stood a minute in the marquee door looking off acrost the market square, hearing Miss Beryl Sessions and the men congratulating each other on the glorious Fourth they was a-having, and the City folks praising them both sky high.

"'Real nice idee it was,' says Silas, with his hands under his best coat tails. 'Nice, tastey, up-to-date Fourth. And cheap to do.'

"'Yes, we all hung out for a good Fourth this year,' says Timothy, complacent.

"'It's a simply lovely idea,' says Miss Beryl Sessions, all sweet and chirpy and interested, 'this making the Fourth a county party and getting everybody in town, so. But tell me: Whatever made you close your shops? I thought the Fourth could always be made to pay for itself over and over, if the business houses went about it right.'

"'Oh, well,' says Silas, lame but genial, 'we closed up to-day. We kind o' thought we would.'

"But I stood looking off acrost the market square, where the children was playing, and

quoits was being pitched, and the ball game was going to commence, and the calathumpians was capering, and most of Red Barns and Indian Mound and Friendship Village was mingling, lion and lamb; and I looked on along Daphne Street, where little Spudge Cadoza wasn't walking with a Prize Coffee board on his back, — and all of a sudden I felt just the way I'd wanted to feel, in spite of all the distance and long-ago-ness. And I turned and says to the other women inside the marquee: —

"'Seems to me,' I says, 'as if the Fourth of July *had* paid for itself, over and over. Oh, don't it to you?'

VI

"THE new editor of the *Friendship Village Evening Daily* give a fine write-up of the celebration. He printed it on the night after the Fourth, not getting out any paper at all on the day that was the day; but on the night after that, the news columns of his paper fell flat and dead. In a village the day following a holiday is like the hush after a noise. The whole town seems like it was either asleep or on tiptoe. And in Friendship Village this hush was worse than the hush of other years. Other years they'd usually been accidents to keep track of, and mebbe even an amputation or two to report. But this Fourth there was no misfortunes whatever, nor nothing to make good reading for the night of July 6.

"So the editor thought over his friends and run right down the news column, telling what there *wasn't*. Like this:—

"'SUPPER TABLE JOTTINGS

"'Postmaster Silas Sykes is well.

"'Timothy Toplady has not had a cold since before Christmas. Prudent Timothy.

"'Jimmy Sturgis has not broken his leg yet this year as he did last. Keep it up, Jimmy.

"'Eppleby Holcomb has not been out of town for quite a while.

"'None of the Friendship ladies has given a party all season.

"'The First Church is not burnt down nor damaged nor repaired. Insurance $750.

"'Nothing local is in much of any trouble.

"'Nobody is dead here to-day except the usual ones.

"'Nobody that's got a telephone in has any company at the present writing. Where is the old-time hospitality?

"'Subscriptions payable in advance.

"'Subscriptions payable in advance.

"'Subscriptions payable in advance.'

"It made quite some fun for us, two or three of us happening in the post-office store when the paper come out — Mis' Sykes and Mis' Toplady and me. But we took it some to heart, too, because to live in a town where they ain't nothing active happening all the time is a kind of running account of everybody that's in the town. And us ladies wan't that kind.

"All them locals done to Silas Sykes, though, was to set him fussing over nothing ever happening to him. Silas is real particular about

his life, and I guess he gets to thinking how life ain't so over-particular about him.

"'My dum,' he says that night, 'that's just the way with this town. I always calculated my life was goin' to be quite some pleasure to me. But I don't see as it is. If I thought I was going to get sold in my death like I've been in my life, I swan I'd lose my interest in dyin'.'

"Mis' Timothy Toplady was over in behind the counter picking out her butter, and she whirled around from sampling the jars, and she says to Mis' Sykes and me:—

"'Ladies,' she says, 'le's us propose it to the editor that seems to have such a hard job, that us members of Sodality take a hold of his paper for a day and get it out for him and put some news in it, and sell it to everybody, subscribers and all, that one night, for ten cents.'

"Mis' Silas Sykes looks up and stopped winking and breathing, in a way she has when she sights some distant money for Sodality.

"'Land, land,' she says, 'I bet they'd go like hot cakes.'

"But Silas he snorts, scorching.

"'Will you ladies tell me,' he says, 'where you going to *get* your news to put in your paper? The Fourth don't come along every day. Or less you commit murder and arson and run-

aways, there won't be any more in your paper than they is in its editor's.'

"That hit a tender town-point, and I couldn't stand it no longer. I spoke right up.

"'Oh, I donno, I donno, Silas,' I says. 'They's those in this town that's doin' the murderin' for us, neat an' nice, right along,' I told him.

"'Mean to say?' snapped Silas.

"'Mean to say,' says I, 'most every grocery store in this town an' most every milkman an' the meat market as well is doin' their best to drag the health out o' people's systems for 'em. Us ladies is more or less well read an' knowledgeable of what is goin' on in the world outside,' I says to Silas that ain't, 'an' we know a thing or two about what ought to be clean.'

"Since Insley come, we had talked a good deal more about these things and what was and what shouldn't be; and especially we had talked it in Sodality, on account of our town stores and social ways and such being so inviting to disease and death. But we hadn't talked it official, 'count of Sodality being for Cemetery use, and talking it scattering we hadn't been able to make the other men even listen to us.

"'Pack o' women!' says Silas, now, and went off to find black molasses for somebody.

"Mis' Toplady sampled her butter, dreamy.

"'Rob Henny's butter here,' she says, 'is made out of cow sheds that I can't bear to think about. An' Silas knows it. Honest,' she says, 'I'm gettin' so I spleen against the flowers in the fields for fear Rob Henny's cows'll get holt of 'em. I should think the *Daily* could write about that.'

"I remember how us three women looked at each other then, like our brains was experimenting with our ideas. And when Mis' Toplady got her butter, we slipped out and spoke together for a few minutes up past the Town Pump. And it was there the plan come to a head and legs and arms. And we see that we had a way of picking purses right off of every day, so be the editor would leave us go ahead — and of doing other things.

"The very next morning we three went to see the editor and get his consent.

"'What's your circulation, same as City papers print to the top of the page?' Mis' Toplady asks him, practical.

"'Paid circulation or got-out circulation?' says the editor.

"'Paid,' says Mis' Toplady, in silver-dollar tones.

"'Ah, well, *paid for* or subscribed for?' asks the editor.

"'Paid for,' says Mis' Toplady, still more financial.

"'Six hundred and eighty paid for,' the editor says, 'an' fifty-two that — mean to pay.'

"'My!' says Mis' Toplady, shuddering. 'What business is! Well, us ladies of the Sodality want to run your paper for one day and charge all your subscribers ten cents extra for that day's paper. Will you?'

"The editor, he laughed quite a little, and then he looked thoughtful. He was new and from the City and young and real nervous — he used to pop onto his feet whenever a woman so much as come in the room.

"'Who would collect the ten cents?' says he.

"'Sodality,' says Mis' Toplady, firm. 'Ourself, cash an' *in advance*.'

"The editor nodded, still smiling.

"'Jove,' he said, 'this fits in remarkably well with the fishing I've been thinking about. I confess I need a day. I suppose you wouldn't want to do it this week?'

"Mis' Toplady looked at me with her eyebrows. But I nodded. I always rather hurry up than not.

"'So be we had a couple o' hours to get the news to happenin',' says she, 'that had ought to do us.'

"The editor looked startled.

"'News!' said he. 'Oh, I say now, you mustn't expect too much. I ought to warn you that running a paper in this town is like trying to raise cream on a cistern.'

"Mis' Toplady smiled at him motherly.

"'You ain't ever tried pouring the cream into the cistern, I guess,' she says.

"So we settled it into a bargain, except that, after we had planned it all out with him and just as we was going out the door, Mis' Toplady thought to say to him:—

"'You know, Sodality don't know anything about it yet, so you'd best not mention it out around till this afternoon when we vote to do it. We'll be up at eight o'clock Thursday morning, rain or shine.'

"There wasn't ever any doubt about Sodality when it see Sixty Dollars ahead — which we would get if everybody bought a paper, and we was determined that everybody should buy. Sodality members scraps among themselves personal, but when it comes to raising money we unite yoke to yoke, and all differences forgot. It's funny sometimes at the meetings, funny and disgraceful, to hear how we object to each other, especially when we're tired, and then how we all unite together on something for

the good of the town. I tell you, it makes me feel sometimes that the way ain't so much to try to love each other, — which other folks' peculiarities is awful in the way of, — but for us all to pitch in and love something altogether, your town or your young folks, or your cemetery or keeping something clean or making somethin' look nice — and before you know it you're loving the folks you work with, no matter how peculiar, or even more so. It's been so nice since we've been working for Cemetery. Folks that make each other mad every time they try to talk can sell side by side at the same bazaar and count the money mutual. There's quite a few disagreements in Sodality, so we have to be real careful who sets next to who to church suppers. But when we pitch in to work for something, we sew rags and 'scallop oysters in the same pan with our enemies. Don't it seem as if that must mean something? Something big?

"Sodality voted to publish the paper, all right, and elected the officers for the day: Editor, Mis' Postmaster Sykes, 'count of her always expecting to take the lead in everything; assistant editor, me, 'count of being well and able to work like a dog; business manager and circulation man, Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-

Bliss, 'count of no dime ever getting away from her unexpected. And the reporters was to be most of the rest of the Sodality: Mis' Timothy Toplady, the three Liberty girls, Mis' Mayor Uppers, Mis' Fire Chief Merriman, Mis' Threat Hubbelthwait, an' Abagail Arnold, that keeps the home bakery. It was hard for Abagail to get away from her cook stove and her counter, so we fixed it that she was to be let off any other literary work along of her furnishing us our sandwiches and hard-boiled eggs that day noon. It was quite a little for Abagail to do, but she's always real willing, and we didn't ask coffee of her. Mis' Sturgis, her that is the village invalid, we arranged should have charge of the Woman's Column, and bring down her rocking chair and make her beef broth right there on the office wood-stove.

"I guess we was all glad to go down early in the morning that day, 'count of not meeting the men. One and all and with one voice the Friendship men had railed at us hearty.

"'Pack o' women!' says Silas Sykes, over and over.

"'You act like bein' a woman an' a wife was some kind o' nonsense,' says Mis' Sykes back at him, majestic. 'Well, I guess bein' yours is.'

"'Land, Amandy,' says Timothy Toplady, 'you women earn money so *nervous*. Why don't you do it regular an' manly?'

"Only Eppleby Holcomb had kept his silence. Eppleby sees things that the run of men don't see, or, if they did see them, they would be bound to stick them in their ledgers where they would never, never belong. Eppleby was our friend, and Sodality never had truer.

"So though we went ahead, the men had made us real anxious. And most of us slipped down to the office by half past seven so's not to meet too many. The editor had had a column in the paper about what we was goin' to do — 'Loyal to our Local Dead' he headed it, and of course full half the town was kicking at the extra ten cents, like full half of any town can and will kick when it's asked to pay out for its own good, dead or alive. But we was leaving all that to Mis' Holcomb, that knows a thing or two about the human in us, and similar.

"Extra-paper morning, when we all come in, Mis' Sykes she was sitting at the editor's desk with her big apron on and a green shade to cover up her crimping kids, and her list that her and Mis' Toplady and I had made out, in front of her.

"'Now then, let's get right to work,' she says brisk. 'We ain't any too much time, I can tell you. It ain't like bakin' bread or gettin' the vegetables ready. We've all got to use muscles this day we ain't used to usin',' she says, 'an' we'd best be spry.'

"So then she begun giving out who was to do what — assignments, the editor named it when he told us what to do. And I skipped back an' hung over the files, well knowing what was to come.

"Mis' Sykes stood up in her most society way, an' —

"'Anybody want to back out?' says she, gracious.

"'Land!' says everyone in a No-I-don't tone.

"'Very well,' says Mis' Sykes. 'Mis' Toplady, you go out to Rob Henney's place, an' you go through his cow sheds from one end to the other an' take down notes so's he sees you doin' it. You go into his kitchen an' don't you let a can get by you. Open his churn. Rub your finger round the inside of his pans. An' if he won't tell you, the neighbours will. Explain to him you're goin' to give him a nice, full printed description in to-night's *Daily*, just the way things are. If he wants it changed

any, he can clean all up, an' we'll write up the clean-up like a compliment.'

"Just for one second them assembled women was dumb. But it hardly took them that instant to sense what was what. And all of a sudden, Mame Holcomb, I guess it was, bursted out in a little understanding giggle, and after a minute everybody joined in, too. For we'd got the whole world of Friendship Village where we wanted it, and every one of them women see we had, so be we wasn't scared.

"'Mis' Uppers,' Mis' Sykes was going on, 'you go down to Betts's meat market. You poke right through into the back room. An' you tell Joe Betts that you're goin' to do a write-up of that room an' the alley back of it for the paper to-night, showin' just what's what. If so be he wants to turn in an' red it up this mornin', tell him you'll wait till noon an' describe it then, *providin'* he keeps it that way. An' you might let him know you're goin' to run over to his slaughterhouse an' look around while you're waitin', an' put that in your write-up, too.'

"'Miss Hubbelthwait,' Mis' Sykes went on, 'you go over to the Calaboose. They won't anybody be in the office — Dick's saloon is that. Skip right through in the back part, an' turn

down the blankets on both beds an' give a thorough look. If it's true they's no sheets an' pillow-cases on the calaboose beds, an' that the blankets is only washed three times a year so's to save launderin', we can make a real interestin' column about that.'

"'Miss Merriman,' says Mis' Sykes to Mis' Fire Chief, 'I've give you a real hard thing because you do things so delicate. Will you take a walk along the residence part of town an' go into every house an' ask 'em to let you see their back door an' their garbage pail. Tell 'em you're goin' to write a couple of columns on how folks manage this. Ask 'em their idees on the best way. Give 'em to understand if there's a real good way they're thinkin' of tryin' that you'll put that in, providin' they begin tryin' right off. An' tell 'em they can get it carted off for ten cents a week if enough go in on it. An' be your most delicate, Mis' Fire Chief, for we don't want to offend a soul.'

"Libby an' Viney Liberty Mis' Sykes sent round to take a straw vote in every business house in town to see how much they'd give towards starting a shelf library in the corner of the post-office store, a full list to be printed in order with the amount or else 'Not a cent'

after each name. And the rest of Sodality she give urrants similar or even more so.

"'An' all o' you,' says Mis' Sykes, 'pick up what you can on the way. And if anybody starts in to object, you tell 'em you have instructions to make an interview out of any of the interestin' things they say. And you might tell 'em you don't want they should be buried in a nice cemetery if they don't want to be.'

"Well, sir, they started off — some scairt, but some real brave, too. And the way they went, we see every one of them meant business.

"'But oh,' says Mis' Sturgis, fixing her medicine bottles outside on the window-sill, '*supposin'* they can't do it. *Supposin'* folks ain't nice to 'em. What'll we put in the paper then?'

"Mis' Sykes drew herself up like she does sometimes in society.

"'Well,' she says, 'supposin'. Are we runnin' this paper or ain't we? There's nothin' to prevent our writin' editorials about these things, as I see. Our husbands can't very well sue us for libel, because they'd hev to pay it themselves. Nor they can't put us in prison for debt, because who'd get their three meals? I can't see but we're sure of an interestin' paper, anyway.'

"Then she looked over at me sort of sad.

"'Go on, Calliope,' says she, 'you know what you've got to do. Do it,' she says, 'to the bitter end.'

"I knew, and I started out, and I made straight for Silas Sykes, and the post-office store. Silas wan't in the store, it was so early; but he had the floor all sprinkled nice, and the vegetables set out, all uncovered, close to the sidewalk; and everything real tasty and according to grocery-store etiquette. The boy was gone that day. And Silas himself was in the back room, sortin' over prunes.

"'Hello, Calliope,' s'he. 'How's literchoor?'

"'Honest as ever,' I says. 'Same with food?'

"'Who says I ain't honest?' says Silas, straightening up, an' holding all his fingers stiff 'count of being sticky.

"'Why, I donno who,' says I. 'Had anybody ought to? How's business, Silas?'

"'Well,' says he, 'for us that keeps ourselves up with the modern business methods, it's pretty good, I guess.'

"'Do you mean pretty good, Silas, or do you mean pretty paying?' I ask' him.

"Silas put on his best official manner. 'Look at here,' s'e, 'what can I do for you? Did you want to buy somethin' or did you want your mail?'

"'Oh, neither,' I says. 'I want some help from you, Silas, about the paper to-day.'

"My, that give Silas a nice minute. He fairly weltered in satisfaction.

"'Huh,' he says, elegant, 'didn't I tell you you was bitin' off more'n you could chew? Want some assistance from me, do you, in editin' this paper o' yours? Well, I suppose I can help you out a little. What is it you want me to do for you?'

"'We thought we'd like to write you up,' I told him.

"Silas just swelled. For a man in public office, Silas Sykes feels about as presidential as anybody I ever see. If they was to come out from the City and put him on the front page of the morning paper, he's the kind that would wonder why they hadn't done it before.

"'Sketch of my life?' s'e, genial. 'Little outline of my boyhood? Main points in my career?'

"'Well,' I says, 'no. We thought the present'd be about all we'd hev room for. We want to write up your business, Silas,' I says, 'in an advertising way.'

"'Oh!' says Silas, snappy. 'You want me to pay to be wrote up, is that it?'

"'Well,' I says, 'no; not if you don't want to.

Of course everybody'll be buried in the Cemetery whether they give anything towards the fund for keeping it kep' up or not.'

"'Lord Heavens,' says Silas, 'I've had that Cemetery fund rammed down my throat till I'm sick o' the thought o' dyin'.'

"That almost made me mad, seeing we was having the disadvantage of doing the work and Silas going to get all the advantages of burial.

"'Feel the same way about some of the Ten Commandments, don't you, Silas?' I says, before I knew it.

"Silas just rared.

"'The Ten Commandments!' says he, 'the Ten Commandments! Who can show me one I ain't a-keepin' like an old sheep. Didn't I honour my father an' mother as long as I had 'em? Did they ever buy anything of me at more than cost? Didn't I give 'em new clothes an' send 'em boxes of oranges an' keep up their life insurance? Do I ever come down to the store on the Sabbath Day? Do I ever distribute the mail then, even if I'm expectin' a letter myself? The Sabbath I locked the cat in, didn't I send the boy down to let it out, for fear I'd be misjudged if I done it? Who do I ever bear false witness against unless I know they've done what I say they've done? I

can't kill a fly — an' I'm that tender-hearted that I make the hired girl take the mice out o' the trap because I can't bring myself to do it. So you might go through the whole list an' just find me workin' at 'em an' a-keepin' 'em. What do you mean about the Ten Commandments?' he ends up, ready to burst.

"'Don't ask me,' I says. 'I ain't that familiar with 'em. I didn't know anybody was. Go on about 'em. Take stealing — you hadn't got to that one.'

"'*Stealing*,' says Silas, pompous. 'I don't know what it is.'

"And with that I was up on my feet.

"'I thought you didn't,' says I. 'Us ladies of Sodality have all thought it over an' over again: That you don't know stealing when you see it. No, nor not even when you've done it. Come here, Silas Sykes!' I says.

"I whipped by him into the store, and he followed me, sheer through being dazed, and keeping still through being knocked dumb.

"'Look here,' I says, 'here's your counter of bakery stuff — put in to take from Abagail, but no matter about that now. Where do you get it? From the City, with the label stuck on. What's the bakery like where you buy it? It's under a sidewalk and dust dirty, and I

happen to know you know it. And look at the bread — not a thing over it, flies promenadin' on the crust, and you counting out change on an apple-pie the other day — I see you do it. Look at your dates, all uncovered and dirt from the street sticking to them like the pattern. Look at your fly-paper, hugged up against your dried-fruit box that's standing wide open. Look at you keeping fish and preserved fruit and canned stuff that you know is against the law — going to start keeping the law quick as you get these sold out, ain't you, Silas? Look at your stuff out there in front, full of street dirt and flies and ready to feed folks. And you keepin' the Ten Commandments like an old sheep — and being a church elder, and you might better climb porches and bust open safes. I s'pose you wonder what I'm sayin' all this to you for?'

"'No, ma'am,' says Silas, like the edge o' something, 'I don't wonder at your sayin' *anything* to anybody.'

"'I've got more to say,' I says, dry. 'I've only give you a sample. An' the place I'm goin' to say it is *The Friendship Village Evening Daily, Extra*, to-night, in a descriptive write-up of you and your store. I thought it might interest you to know.'

"'It's libel — it's libel!' says Silas, arms waving.

"'All right,' says I, liberating a fly accidentally caught on a date. 'Who you going to sue? Your wife, that's the editor? And everybody else's wife, that's doing the same thing to every behind-the-times dealer in town?'

"Silas hung on to that straw.

"'Be they doin' it to the others, too?' he asks.

"Then I told him.

"'Yes,' I says, 'Silas, only — they ain't goin' to start writing up the descriptions till noon. And if you — and they all — want to clean up the temples where you do business and make them fit for the Lord to look down on and a human being to come into, you've got your chance. And seeing your boy is gone to-day, if you'll do it, I'll stay and help you with it — and mebbe make room for some of the main points in your career as well,' says I, sly.

"Silas looked out the door, his arms folded and his beard almost pointing up, he'd made his chin so firm. And just in that minute when I was feeling that all the law and the prophets, and the health of Friendship Village, and the life of people not born, was hanging around that man's neck — or the principle of them, any-

way — Silas's eye and mine fell on a strange sight. Across the street, from out Joe Betts's meat market come Joe Betts, and behind him his boy. And Joe begun pointing, and the boy begun taking down quarters of beef hung over the sidewalk. Joe pointed consid'able. And then he clim' up on his meat wagon that stood by the door, and out of the shop I see Mis' Mayor Uppers come, looking ready to drop. And she clim' up to the seat beside him — he reaching down real gentlemanly to help her up. And he headed his horse around on what I guessed was a bee-line for the slaughterhouse.

"Well, sir, at that, Silas Sykes put his hands on his knees and bent over and begun laughing. And he laughed like I ain't seen him since he's got old and begun to believe that life ain't cut after his own plan that he made. And I laughed a little, too, out of sheer being glad that a laugh can settle so many things right in the world. And when he sobered down a little, I says gentle: —

"'Silas, I'll throw out the dates and the dusty lettuce. And we'll hev it done in no time. I'll be glad to get an early start on the write-up. I don't compose very ready,' I told him.

"He was awful funny while we done the work. He was awful still, too. Once when I lit on a

piece of salt pork that I knew, first look, was rusty, 'Them folks down on the flats buys it,' he says. 'They like it just as good as new-killed.' 'All right,' s'I, careless, 'I'll make a note of that to shine in my article. It needs humour some,' s'I. Then Silas swore, soft and under his breath, as an elder should, but quite vital. And he took the pork out to the alley barrel, an' I sprinkled ashes on it so's he shouldn't slip out and save it afterwards.

"It was 'leven o'clock when we got done, me having swept out behind the counters myself. and Silas he mopped his face and stood hauling at his collar.

"'I'll get on my white kids now,' s'e, dry. 'I can't go pourin' kerosene an' slicin' cheese in this place barehanded any more. Gosh,' he says, 'I bet when they see it, they'll want to have church in here this comin' Sunday.'

"'No need to be sacrilegious, as I know of, Silas,' s'I, sharp.

"'No need to be livin' at all, as I see,' says Silas, morbid; 'just lay low an' other folks'll step in an' do it for you, real capable.'

"I give him the last word. I thought it was his man's due.

"When I got back to the office, Libby Liberty an' Mis' Toplady was there before me.

They was both setting on high stools up to the file shelf, with their feet tucked up, an' the reason was that Viney Liberty was mopping the floor. She had a big pail of suds and her skirt pinned up, and she was just lathering them boards. Mis' Sykes at the main desk was still labouring over her editorials, breathing hard, the boards steaming soap all around her.

"'I couldn't stand it,' Viney says. 'How a man can mould public opinion in a place where the floor is pot-black gets me. My land, my ash house is a dinin' room side of this room, an' the window was a regular gray frost with dust. Ain't men the funniest lot of folks?' she says.

"'Funny,' says I, 'but awful amiable if you kind of sing their key-note to 'em.'

"Mis' Sykes pulled my skirt.

"'How was he?' she asks in a pale voice.

"'He was crusty,' says I, triumphant, 'but he's beat.'

"She never smiled. 'Calliope Marsh,' says she, cold, 'if you've sassed my husband, I'll never forgive you.'

"I tell you, men may be some funny, and often are. But women is odd as Dick's hatband and I don't know but odder.

"'How'd you get on?' I says to Mis' Toplady and the Libertys. The Libertys they handed

out a list on two sheets, both sides with sums ranging from ten to fifty cents towards a shelf library for public use; but Mis' Toplady, the tears was near streaming down her cheeks.

"'Rob Henney,' she says, mournful, 'gimme to understand he'd see me in — some place he hadn't ought to of spoke of to me, nor to no one — before I could get in his milk sheds.'

"'What did you say to him?' I ask', sympathetic.

"'I t-told him,' says Mis' Toplady, 'that lookin' for me wouldn't be the only reason he'd hev for goin' there. And then he said some more. He said he'd be in here this afternoon to stop his subscription off.'

"'So you didn't get a thing?' I says, grieving for her, but Mis' Toplady, she bridled through her tears.

"'I got a column!' she flashed out. 'I put in about the sheds, that the whole town knows, anyway, an' I put in what he said to me. An' I'm goin' to read it to him when he comes in. An' after that he can take his pick about havin' it published, or else cleanin' up an' allowin' Sodality to inspect him reg'lar.'

"By just before twelve o'clock we was all back in the office, Mis' Fire Chief, Mis' Uppers, fresh from the slaughterhouse, and so on, all

but Mame Holcomb that was out seeing to the circulation. And I tell you we set to work in earnest, some of us to the desks, and some of us working on their laps, and everybody hurrying hectic. The office was awful hot — Mis' Sturgis had built up a little light fire to heat up her beef broth, and she was stirring it, her shawl folded about her, in between writing receipts. But it made it real confusing, all of us doing our best so hard, and wanting to tell each other what had happened, and seeing about spelling and all.

"'Land, land,' says Mis' Fire Chief Merriman, 'you'd ought to *see* the Carters' back door. They wan't nobody to home there, so I just took a look, anyway, bein' it was for Sodality, so. They ain't no real garbage pail — '

"'Who said, "Give me Liberty or give me Death?"' ask' Mis' Sykes, looking up kind o' glassy. 'Was it Daniel Webster or Daniel Boone?'

"'Ladies,' says Mis' Hubbelthwait, when we'd settled down on Daniel Boone, 'if I ever do a crime, I won't stop short at stealin' somebody's cow an' goin' to calaboose. I'll do a whole beef corner, or some real United States sin, an' get put in a place that's clean. Why over to the calaboose — '

"'Ugh!' says Mis' Uppers, 'don't say "beef" when I'm where I can hear. I donno what I'll do without my steak, but do it I will. Ladies, the cleanest of us is soundin' brass an' tinklin' cannibals. Why do they call 'em *tinklin'* cannibals?' she wondered to us all.

"'Oh —,' wailed Mis' Sturgis in the rocking-chair, 'some of you ladies give me your salad dressing receipt. Mine is real good on salad, but on paper it don't sound fit to eat. I don't seem to have no book-style about me to-day.'

"'How do you spell *embarrass?*' asked Libby Liberty. 'Is it an *r* an' two *s*'s or two *r*'s and an *s*?'

"'It's two *s*'s at the end, so it must be one *r*,' volunteers Mis' Sykes. 'That used to mix me up some, too.'

"Just then up come Abagail Arnold bringing the noon lunch, and she had the sandwiches and the eggs not only, but a pot of hot coffee thrown in, and a basket of doughnuts, sugared. She set them out on Mis' Sykes's desk, and we all laid down our pencils and drew up on our high stools and swing chairs, Mis' Sturgis and all, and nothing in the line of food had ever looked so welcoming.

"'Oh, the eatableness of nice refreshments!' says Mis' Toplady, sighing.

"'This is when it ain't victuals, its viands,' says Mis' Sykes, showing pleased.

"But well do I remember, we wasn't started to eat, and Abagail still doing the pouring, when the composing room door opened — I donno *why* they called it that, for we done the composing in the office, and they only got out the paper in there — and in come the foreman, with an apron of bed-ticking. He was Riddy Styles, that we all knew him.

"'Excuse me,' he says, hesitating, 'but us fellows thought we'd ought to mention that we can't get no paper out by quittin' time if we don't get a-hold of some copy pretty quick.'

"'Copy o' what?' says Mis' Sykes, our editor.

"'Why, copy,' says Riddy. 'Stuff for the paper.'

"Mis' Sykes looked at him, majestic.

"'*Stuff*,' she says. 'You will please to speak,' she says, 'more respectfully than that to us ladies, Mr. Styles.'

"'It was meant right,' says Riddy, stubborn. 'It's the word we always use.'

"'It ain't the word you use, not with us,' says Mis' Sykes, womanly.

"'Well,' says Riddy, 'we'd ought to get to settin' up *somethin'* by half past twelve, if we start in on the dictionary.'

"Then he went off to his dinner, and the other men with him, and Mis' Sykes leaned back limp.

"'I been writin' steady,' she says, 'since half past eight o' clock this mornin', an' I've only got one page an' one-half composed.'

"We ask' each other around, and none of us was no more then started, let be it was Mis' Toplady, that had got in first.

"'Le's us leave our lunch,' says Mis' Sykes, then. 'Le's us leave it un-et. Abagail, you put it back in the basket an' pour the coffee into the pot. An' le's us *write*. Wouldn't we all rather hev one of our sick headaches,' she says, firm, 'than mebbe make ourselves the Laughing Stock? Ladies, I ask you.'

"An' we woulded, one and all. Sick headaches don't last long, but laughed-at has regular right down eternal life.

"Ain't it strange how slow the writing muscles and such is, that you don't use often? Pitting cherries, splitting squash, peeling potatoes, slicing apples, making change at church suppers,—us ladies is lightning at 'em all. But getting idees down on paper — I declare if it ain't more like waiting around for your bread to raise on a cold morning. Still when you're worried, you can press forward more than normal, and

among us we had quite some material ready for Riddy and the men when they came back. But not Mis' Sykes. She wan't getting on at all.

"'If I could only *talk* it,' she says, grieving, 'or I donno if I could even do that. What I want to say is in me, rarin' around my head like life, an' yet I can't get it out no more'n money out of a tin bank. I shall disgrace Sodality,' she says, wild.

"'Cheer up,' says Libby Liberty, soothing. 'Nobody ever reads the editorials, anyway. I ain't read one in years.'

"'You tend to your article,' snaps Mis' Sykes.

"I had got my write-up of Silas all turned in to Riddy, and I was looking longing at Abagail's basket, when, banging the door, in come somebody breathing like raging, and it was Rob Henney, that I guess we'd all forgot about except it was Mis' Toplady that was waiting for him.

"Rob Henney always talks like he was long distance.

"'I come in,' he says, blustering, 'I come in to quit off my subscription to this fool paper, that a lot o' fool women —'

"Mis' Sykes looks up at him out from under her hand that her head was resting on.

"'Go on out o' here, Mr. Henney,' she says

sharp to him, 'an' quit your subscription quiet. Can't you see you're disturbing us?' she says.

"With that Mis' Toplady wheeled around on her high stool and looked at him, calm as a clock.

"'Rob Henney,' says she, 'you come over here. I'll read you what I've wrote about you,' she told him.

"The piece begun like this:—

"'Rob Henney, our esteemed fellow-townsman and milkman, was talked with this morning on his cow sheds. The reporter said to same that what was wanting would be visiting the stables, churn, cans, pans, and like that, being death is milked out of most cows if they are not kept clean and inspected regular for signs of consumption. Mr. Henney replied as follows:

"'First: That his cows had never been inspected because nothing of that kind had ever been necessary.

"'Second: That he was in the milk business for a living, and did the town expect him to keep it in milk for its health?

"'Third: That folks had been drinking milk since milk begun, and if the Lord saw fit to call them home, why not through milk, or even through consumption, as well as through pneumonia and others?

"'Fourth: That he would see the reporter — a lady — in the lake-that-burneth-with-fire before his sheds and churn and pans and cans should be put in the paper.

"'Below is how the sheds, churn, pans, and cans look to-day. . . .' And I tell you, Mis' Toplady, she didn't spare no words. When she meant What, she said What, elaborate.

"I didn't know for a minute but we'd hev to mop Rob up off the clean floor. But Mis' Toplady she never forgot who she was.

"'Either that goes in the paper to-night,' she says, 'or you'll clean up your milk surroundin's — pick your choice. An' Sodality's through with you if you don't, besides.'

"'Put it in print! Put it in print, if you dast!' yells Rob, wind-milling his arms some.

"'No need to make an earthquake o' yourself,' Mis' Toplady points out to him, serene.

"And at that Rob adds a word intending to express a cussing idee, and he outs and down the stairs. And Mis' Toplady starts to take her article right in to Riddy. But in the door she met Riddy, hurrying into the office again. I never see anybody before that looked both red and haggard, but Riddy did. He come right to the point:—

"'Some of you ladies has got to quit handing

in — news,' he says, scrabbling for a word to please Mis' Sykes. 'We're up to our eyes in here now. An' there ain't enough room in the paper, either, not without you get out eight pages or else run a supplement or else throw away the whole patent inside. An' those ways, we ain't got enough type even if we had time to burn.'

"Mis' Sykes pushed back her green shade, looking just *chased.*

"'What does he mean?' she says. 'Can't he tend to his type and things with us doing all the work?'

"Riddy took this real nettlish.

"'I mean,' s'he, clear but brutal, 'you got to cut your stuff somewheres to the tune of a couple o' columns.'

"Well, it's hard to pick out which colour you'll take when you have a new dress only once in every so seldom; or which of your hens you'll kill when you know your chickens like you know your own mind; but these are nothing to the time we had deciding on what to omit out of the paper that night. And the decision hurt us even more than the deciding, for what we left out was Mis' Sturgis's two women's columns.

"'We *can't* leave out meat nor milk nor cleanliness nor the library,' says Mis' Toplady, reason-

able, 'because them are the things we live by. An' so with the other write-ups we got planned. But receipts and patterns an' moth balls is only kind o' decorations, seems though. Besides, we all know about 'em, an' it's time we stopped talkin' about 'em, anyway.'

"Mis' Sturgis she cried a little on the corner of her shawl.

"'The receipts an' patterns an' moth balls is so w-womanly,' she says.

"Mis' Toplady whirled round at her.

"'If you know anything more womanly than conquerin' dirt an' disease an' the-dead-that-needn't-die,' s'she, 'I'll roll up my sleeves an' be into it. But it won't be eyelet embroidery nor yet boiled frostin'!'

"After that they wrote in hasty peace, though four o'clock come racing across the day like a runaway horse, and us not out of its way. And a few minutes past, when Riddy was waiting in the door for Mis' Sykes's last page, somebody most knocked him over, and there come Mis' Holcomb, our circulation editor, purple and white, like a ghost.

"'Lock the door — lock it!' she says. 'I've bolted the one to the foot of the stairs. Lock both outside ones an' lay yourselves low!' s'she.

"Riddy an' I done the locking, me well know-

ing Mis' Holcomb couldn't give a false alarm no more than a map could.

"'What is it?' we says, pressing Mis' Holcomb to speak, that couldn't even breathe.

"'Oh, ladies,' says Mis' Holcomb, 'they've rejoined us, or whatever it is they do. I mean they're going to rejoin us from gettin' out to-night's paper. The sheriff or the coroner or whoever it is they have, is comin' with injunctions — *is* that like handcuffs, do you know? An' it's Rob Henney's doin'. Eppleby told me. An' I run down the alley an' beat 'em to it. They're most here. Let's us slap into print what's wrote an' be ready with the papers the livin' minute we can.'

"Mis' Sykes had shoved her green shade onto the back of her head, and her crimping pins was all showing forth.

"'What good'll it do us to get the paper *out?*' says she, in a numb voice. 'We can't distribute 'em around to no one with the sheriff to the front door with them things to put on us.'

"Then Mis' Holcomb smiled, with her eyes shut, where she sat, breathing so hard it showed through.

"'I come in the coal door, at the alley,' s' she. 'They'll never think o' that. Besides, the crowd'll be in front an' the carrier boys too, an'

they'll want to show off out there. An' Eppleby knows — he told me to come in that way — an' he'll keep 'em interested out in front. Le's us each take the papers, an' out the coal door, an' distribute 'em around, ourselves, without the boys, an' collect in the money same time.'

"And that was how we done. For when they come to the door and found it locked, they pounded a little to show who was who and who wan't and then they waited out there calm enough, thinking to stop us when the papers come down would be plenty time. They waited out there, calm and sure, while upstairs Bedlam went on, but noiseless. And after us ladies was done with our part, we sat huddled up in the office, soothing Mis' Sturgis and each other.

"'In one sentence,' Mis' Holcomb says, 'Eppleby says Rob Henney was going to *put* injunctions on us. An' in the next he says he was goin' to *serve* 'em. What did he mean by that, do you s'pose?'

"'I donno what he meant,' says Mis' Toplady, 'but I wouldn't have anything to do with *anything* Rob Henney served.'

"That made us think of Abagail's lunch, laying un-et in the basket. They wasn't none of us felt like eating, but Mis' Sturgis says she bet if we didn't eat it, Abagail would feel she

hadn't had no part in writing the paper like us, and so we broke off a little something once around; but food didn't have much fun for us, not then. And nothing did up to the minute the paper was done, and we was all ready to sly out the alley door.

"With Sodality and Riddy Styles and the composing-room men we had above twenty carriers. Riddy and the men helped us, one and all, because of course the paper was a little theirs, too, and they was interested and liked the lark. Land, land, I ain't felt so young or so wicked as I done getting out that alley door. There's them I wish could see that there's just as much fun keeping secret about something that may be good as in being sly about something regular bad.

"When we finally got outside it was supper-time and summer seeming, and the hour was all sweet and frank, and the whole village was buried in its evening fried mush and potatoes, or else sprinkling their front yards. I donno how it was with the others, but I know I went along the streets seeing through them little houses like they was glass, and seeing the young folks eating their suppers and growing up and getting ready to live and to *be*. And in us ladies' arms, in them heavy papers, it seemed

to me we was carrying new life to them, in little ways — in little ways, but ways that was going to be big with meaning. And I felt as if something in me kind of snuggled up closer to the way things was meant to be.

"Us that went west got clear the whole length of Daphne Street without anybody seeing what we was doing, or else believing that we was doing it orderly and legitimate. And away out by the Pump pasture, we started in distributing, and we come working down town, handing out papers to the residence part like mad and taking in dimes like wild. They was so many of us, and the *Evening Daily* office was so located, that by the time Mis' Sykes and Mis' Toplady and I come around the corner where the men and Rob Henney and the rejoiners and the carriers was loafing, waiting, smoking, and secure, we didn't have many papers left. And we three was the first ones back.

"'Evenin' paper?' says Mis' Toplady, casual. '*Friendship Village Evenin' Daily, Extra?* All the news for a dime?'

"Never have I see a man so truly flabbergasted as Rob Henney, and he did look like death.

"'You're rejoined!' he yelled, or whatever it is they say — 'you're rejoined by law from

printin' your papers or from deestributin' the same.'

"'Why, Rob Henney,' says Mis' Toplady, 'no call to show fight like that. Half the town is readin' its papers by now. They've been out for three-quarters of an hour,' she says.

"Then soft and faint and acrost the street, we heard somebody laugh, and then kind of spat hands; and we all looked up. And there in the open upstairs window of the building opposite, we see leaning out Eppleby Holcomb and Timothy Toplady and Silas Sykes. And when we crossed eyes, they all made a little cheer like a theatre; and then they come clumping down stairs and acrost to where we was.

"'Won out, didn't you, by heck!' says Silas, that can only see that far.

"'Blisterin' Benson,' says Timothy, gleeful. '*I* say we ain't got no cause to regret our wifes' brains.'

"But Eppleby, he never said a word. He just smiled slow and a-looking past us. And we knew that from the beginning he had seen our whole plan, face to face.

"Mis' Sykes and Mis' Toplady and me, seeing how Rob Henney stood muttering and beat, and seeing how the day had gone, and seeing what was what in the world and in all outside

of it, we looked at each other, dead tired, and real happy, and then we just dragged along home to our kitchens and went to cooking supper. But oh, it wasn't our same old kitchens nor it wasn't our same old Friendship Village. We was in places newer and better and up higher, where we see how things are, and how life would get more particular about us if we'd get particular about some more of life.

VII

"WELL, of course then we had Sixty Dollars or so to spend, and Sodality never could rest a minute when it had money to do with if it wasn't doing it, any more than it could rest when it had something to do and no money to do with. It made a nice, active circle. Wishing for dreams to come true, and then, when they do come true, making the true things sprout more dreams, is another of them circles. I always think they're what keeps us a-going, not only immortal but busy.

"And then with us there's another reason for voting our money prompt. As soon as we've made any and the news has got out around, it's happened two-three times that somebody has put in an application for a headstone for somebody dead that can't afford one. The first time that was done the application was made by the wife of a harness maker that had a little shop in the back street and had been saving up his money for a good tombstone. 'I ain't had much of a position here in life,' he used to say. 'I never was pointed out as a leading citizen.

But I'm goin' to fix it so's when I'm buried and folks come to the Cemetery, nobody'll get by my grave without noticin' my tombstone.' And then he took sick with inflammatory rheumatism, and if it didn't last him three years and et up his whole tombstone fund. He use' to worry about it considerable as the rheumatism kept reducing the granite inch after inch, and he died, thinking he wasn't going to have nothing but markers to him. So his old wife come and told Sodality, crying to think he wasn't going to seem no real true inhabitant of Cemetery, any more than he had of the village. And we felt so sorry for her we took part of the Thirty Dollars we'd made at the rummage sale and bought him a nice cement stone, and put the verse on to attract attention that he'd wrote himself: —

"'STOP. LOOK. LISTEN.
HERE LAYS ME.
MY GRAVE IS JUST AS BIG
AS YOURS WILL BE.'

"Some was inclined to criticise Jeb for being so ambitious in death, and stopping to think how good a showing he could make. But I donno, I always sort of understood him. He wanted to be somebody. He'd used to try to

have a voice in public affairs, but somehow what he proposed wasn't ever practical and never could get itself adopted. His judgment wasn't much, and time and again he'd voted against the town's good, and he see it afterward. He missed being a real citizen of his town, and he knew it, and he hankered to be a citizen of his Cemetery. And wherever he is now, I bet that healthy hankering is strained and purified and helping him ahead.

"But our buying that stone for Jeb's widow's husband's grave let us in for perpetual applications for monuments; and so when we had any money we always went right to work and voted it for general Cemetery improvement, so there wasn't ever any money in the treasury for the applications. Anyway, we felt we'd ought to encourage self-made graves and not pauperize our corpses.

"So the very next afternoon after we got our paper out, we met at Mis' Sykes's; and the day being mild and gold, almost all of Sodality turned out, and Mis' Sykes used both her parlours. It was funny; but such times there fell on them that sat Front Parlour a sort of what-you-might-call-distinction over them that sat Back Parlour. It's the same to our parties. Them that are set down to the dining-room table always seem a

little more company than them that are served to the little sewing tables around in the open rooms, and we all feel it, though we all pretend not, as well-bred as we know how. I donno but there's something to it, too. Mis' Sykes, for instance, she always gets put to a dining table. Nobody would ever think of setting her down to a small one, no more than they would a Proudfit. But me, I generally get tucked down to a sewing table and in a rocking-chair, if there ain't enough cane seats to go around. Things often divide themselves true to themselves in this life, after all.

"This was the last regular meeting before our Annual. The Annual, at Insley's suggestion, was going to be in the schoolhouse, and it was going to be an open evening meeting, with the whole town invited in and ice-cream served after. Regular meetings Sodality gives just tea; special meetings we give hot chocolate or ice-lemonade, or both if the weather is unsettled; for entertainments we have cut-up fruit and little bakery cakes; but to our Annual we mount up to ice-cream and some of our best cake makers' layer cake. And us ladies always dress according: afternoon home dresses to regular meetings; second best to specials; Sunday silks to entertainments; and straight going-out

clothes for the Annual. It makes it real nice. Nobody need to come dressed wrong, and nobody can go away disappointed at what they've been fed.

"The meeting that day all ought to have gone smooth enough, it being so nice that our paper had sold well and all, but I guess the most of us was too tired out to have tried to have a meeting so soon. Anyhow, we didn't seem to come together slippery and light-running, like we do some days; but instead I see the minute we begun to collect that we was all inclined to be heavy and, though not cross, yet frictionish.

"For instance: Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss had come in a new red waist with black raspberry buttons. And it was too much for Mis' Fire Chief Merriman that's been turning her black poplin ever since the Fire Chief died.

"'Dear me, Mis' Holcomb,' she says, 'I never see anybody have more dressy clothes. Did you put that on just for us?'

"Mis' Holcomb shut her lips tight.

"'This is for home wear,' she says short, when she opened them.

"'Mean to say you get a cooked supper in that rig?' says Mis' Merriman. 'Fry meat in it, do you?'

"'We don't eat as hearty as some,' says Mame. 'We don't insist on warm suppers. We feel at *our* house we have to keep our bills down.'

"Mis' Merriman straightened up, real brittle.

"'My gracious,' she says, 'I guess I live as cheap as the best does.'

"'I see you buying *shelled* nuts, just the same,' says Mis' Holcomb, 'when shellin' 'em with your fingers cost twenty cents off.'

"'I ain't never had my store-buyin' criticised before,' says Mis' Merriman, elbows back.

"'Nor,' says Mis' Holcomb, bitter, 'have I ever before, in my twenty-six years of married life, ever been called *dressy*.'

"Then Mis' Toplady, she sort of shouldered into the minute, big and placid and nice-feeling.

"'Mame,' she says, 'set over here where you can use the lead-pencil on my watch chain, and put down that crochet pattern I wanted, will you?'

"Mame come over by her and took the pencil, Mis' Toplady leaning over so's she could use it; but before she put the crochet pattern down, Mame made one, experimental, on the stiff bottom of her work-bag, and Libby Liberty thought she'd make a little joking.

"'S-sh-h,' says Libby, 'the authoress is takin' down notes.'

"Mis' Holcomb has had two-three poems in the *Friendship Daily*, and she's real sensitive over it.

"'I'd be polite if I couldn't be pleasant, Libby,' says Mame, acid.

"'I'm pleasant enough to pleasant folks,' snaps Libby, up in arms in a minute. Nothing whatever makes anybody so mad as to have what was meant playful took plain.

"'I,' says Mis' Holcomb, majestic, 'would pay some attention to my company manners, no matter what I was in the home.'

"'That makes me think,' puts in Mis' Toplady, hasty, 'speaking of company so, who's heard anything about the evenin' company up to Proudfits'?'

"It was something all our heads was full of, being half the village had just been invited in to the big evening affair that was to end up the house party, and we'd all of pitched in and talked fast anyhow to take our minds off the spat.

"'Elbert's comin' home to go to it an' to stay Sunday an' as much as he can spare,' says Mis' Sykes. Elbert is her son and all Silas Sykes ought to of been, Elbert is.

"'Letty Ames is home for the party, too,' says Libby Liberty, speaking up in defence of their block, that Letty lives in. She's just gradu-

ated at Indian Mound and has been visiting up the state.

"My niece that had come on for a few days would be gone before the party come off, so she didn't seem worth mentioning for real news value at a time when everything was centring in an evening company at Proudfit House. No doubt about it, Proudfit House does give distinction to Friendship Village, kind of like a finishing school would, or a circus wintering in us.

"'I heard,' says Mis' Jimmy Sturgis, 'that the hired help set up all night long cleanin' the silver. I shouldn't think *that* would of been necessary, with any kind of management behind 'em.'

"'You don't get much management now'-days,' says Mis' Hubbelthwait, sighing. 'Things slap along awful haphazard.'

"'I know I ain't the system to myself that I use' to have,' says Abagail Arnold. 'Why, the other day I found my soda in one butt'ry an' my bakin' powder in the other.'

"'An' I heard,' says Mame Holcomb — that's one thing about Mame, you can't keep her mad. She'll flare up and be a tongue of flame one minute, and the next she's actin' like a friendly open fire on a family hearth. And I always trust that kind — I can't help it — 'I heard,' she said, 'that for the party that night the ice-

cream is coming in forms, calla-lilies an' dogs an' like that.'

"'I heard,' says Mis' Uppers, 'that Emerel Daniel was invited up to help an' she set up nights and got her a new dress for helpin' in, and now little Otie's sick and she likely can't go near.'

"Mis' Toplady looks over her glasses.

"'Is Otie sick again?' says she. 'Well, if Emerel don't move out of Black Hollow, she'll lose him just like she done Abe. Can't she sell?'

"Black Hollow is the town's pet breeding place for typhoid, that the ladies has been at the council to clean up for a year now. And nobody will buy there, so Emerel's had to live in her house to save rent.

"'She's made her a nice dress an' she was so excited and pleased,' says Mis' Uppers, grieving. 'I do hope it was a dark shade so if bereavement follows —'

"'I suppose you'll have a new cloth, Mis' Sykes,' says Mis' Hubbelthwait, 'you're so up-to-date.' It's always one trouble with Mis' Hubbelthwait: she will flatter the flatterable. But that time it didn't work. Mis' Sykes was up on a chair fixing a window-shade that had flew up, and I guess she must have pinched her finger, she was so crispy.

"'I thought I *had* things that was full stylish enough to wear,' she says stiff.

"'I didn't mean harm,' says Mis' Hubbelthwait, humble.

"Just then we all got up to see out the window, for the Proudfit automobile drew up to Mis' Sykes's gate. They was several folks in it, like they had been most of the time during the house party, with everybody flying hither and yon; and they was letting Mis' Emmons out. It was just exactly like her to remember to come right out of the midst of a house party to a meeting of Sodality. That woman was pure gold. When they was a lot of things to choose about, she always seemed to let the pleasant and the light and the easy-to-do slip right through her fingers, that would close up by and by on the big real thing that most folks would pretend to try to catch *after* it had slipped through, and yet would be awful glad to see disappearing.

"We didn't talk clothes any more after Mis' Emmons come in. Some way her clothes was so professional seeming, in colour and cut, that beside of her the rest of us never said much about ours; though I will say Mis' Emmons always wore her clothes like she was no more thinking about them than she would be thinking about morning housework togs.

"'Well-said, how's the little boy, Mis' Emmons?' asks Mis' Toplady, hearty. 'I declare I couldn't go to sleep a night or two ago for thinkin' about the little soul. Heard any sound out of his folks?'

"'I'm going to tell you about that pretty soon,' Mis' Emmons answered — and it made my heart beat a little with wondering if she'd got her plans thought out, not only four-square, but tower-high. 'He is well — he wanted to come to the meeting. "I like ladies," he said, "when they look at me like loving, but not when they touch me much." Mr. Insley has him out walking.'

"'Little soul,' says Mis' Toplady, again.

"Out in the back parlour, some of us had been talking about Christopher already.

"'I heard,' Mis' Merriman says, that wasn't to the church the night Christopher come, 'I heard that he didn't have much of any clothes on. An' that nobody could understand what he said. An' that nobody could get him to speak a word.'

"'Pshaw,' Mis' Sturgis puts in, 'he was a nice-dressed little boy, though wet; an' quite conversational.'

"'Well, I think it's a great problem,' says Mis' Uppers. 'He's too young for the poorhouse and

too old for the babies' home. Seems like they wasn't anything *to* do with him.'

"There come a lull when Mis' Postmaster Sykes, in a ruffled lawn that had shrunk too short for anything but house wear, stood up by the piano and called the meeting to order. And when we'd got on down to new business, the purpose of the meeting and a hint of the pleasure was stated formal by Mis' Sykes herself. 'One thing why I like to preside at Sodality,' I heard her tell once, 'is, you do get your say whenever you want it, and nobody can interrupt you when you're in the chair.'

"'Ladies,' she says, 'we've seen from the treasurer's report we've got some Sixty-odd Dollars on hand. The question is, where shall we vote it to. Let the discussion be free.'

"Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss spoke first, with a kind of a bright manner of having thought it all out over her dish pan and her bread pan. There is this about belonging to Sodality: We just live Sodality every day, around our work. We don't forget it except to meetings, same as some.

"'Well, I just tell you what,' Mame says, 'I think now is our time to get a big monument for the middle of Cemetery that'll do some credit to the Dead. All our little local head-

stones is quite tasty and shows our interest in them that's gone before; but not one of them is real up-to-date. Let's buy a nice monument that'll show from the railroad track.'

"I spoke up short off from the back parlour, where I set 'scallopin' a bedspread about as big as the carpet.

"'Who to?' I says.

"'Oh, I donno's it makes much differ'nce,' Mis' Holcomb says, warming to her theme, 'so's it was some leadin' citizen. We might take a town vote on it.'

"Mis' Sturgis set up straight, eyebrows up. I donno how it is, but Mis' Sturgis's pompadour always seems so much higher as soon as she gets interested.

"'Why, my gracious,' she says, 'we might earn quite a lot o' money that way. We might have a regular votin' contest on who that's dead should get the monument — so much a vote an' the names of the successful ones run every night in the *Daily* —'

"'Well-a, why do it for anybody dead?' says Libby Liberty. 'Why not get the monument here and have it on view an' then have folks kind of bid on it for their own, real votin' style. In the cities now everybody picks out their own monuments ahead of time. That would

be doing for the Living, the way Mr. Insley said.'

"'Oh, there'd be hard feelin' that way,' spoke up Mis' Uppers, decided. 'Whoever got it, an' got buried under it, never could feel it was his own stone. Everybody that had bought votes for themselves could come out walking in the Cemetery Sunday afternoons and could point out the monument and tell how much of a money interest they had in it. Oh, no, I don't think that'd do at all.'

"'Well, stick to havin' it for the Dead, then,' Libby gives in. 'We've got to remember our constitution.'

"Mis' Amanda Toplady was always going down after something in the bottom of her pocket, set low in her full black skirt. She done this now, for a spool or a lozenger. And she says, meantime: 'Seems like that'd be awful irreverent, connectin' up the Dead with votes that way.'

"'*My* notion,' says Mis' Sykes, with her way of throwin' up one corner of her head, 'it ain't one-tenth part as irreverent as forgettin' all about 'em.'

"'Of course it ain't,' agreed Mis' Hubbelthwait. 'Real, true irreverence is made up of buryin' folks and leavin' 'em go their way.

Why, I bet you there ain't any one of 'em that wouldn't be cheered up by bein' voted for.'

"I couldn't help piping up again from the back parlour. 'What about them that don't get no votes?' I asks. 'What about them that is beat in death like they may of been in life? What's there to cheer them up? If I was them,' says I, 'I'd ha'nt the whole Sodality.'

"'No need to be so sacrilegious in speakin' of the Dead as I know of, Calliope,' says Mis' Sykes that was in the chair and could rebuke at will.

"That made me kind o' mad, and I answered back, chair or no chair: 'A thing is sacrilegious,' says I, 'according to which side of the fence you're on. But the fence it don't change none.'

"Mis' Toplady looked over her glasses and out the window and like she see far away.

"'Land, land,' she says, 'I'd like to take that Sixty Dollars and hire some place to invite the young folks into evenings, that don't have no place to go on earth for fun. Friendship Village,' says she, 'is about as lively as Cemetery is for the young folks.'

"'Well, but, Mis' Toplady,' says Mis' Sykes, reprovin', 'the young folks is alive and able to see to themselves. They don't come in

Sodality's scope. Everything we do has got to be connect' with Cemetery.'

"'I can't help it,' Mis' Toplady answers, 'if it is. I'd like to invite 'em in for some good safe evenin's somewheres instead of leaving 'em trapse the streets. And if I had to have Cemetery in it somehow, I donno but I'd make it a lawn party and give it in Cemetery and have done with it.'

"We all laughed, but I knew that underneath, Mis' Toplady was kind of half-and-half in earnest.

"'The young folks,' says Mis' Sykes, mysterious, 'is going to be took care of by the proper means, very, very soon.'

"'I donno,' says Mis' Holcomb, obstinate. 'I think the monument is a real nice idea. Grandfather Holcomb, now, him that helped draft the town, or whatever it is they do, I bet he'd be real pleased to be voted for.'

"But Mis' Fire Chief Merriman, seems she couldn't forget the little way Mame had spoke to her before, and she leaned forward and cut her way into the talking.

"'Why, Mis' Holcomb,' she says, 'of course your Grandfather Holcomb can be voted on if he wants to and if he thinks he could get it. But dead though he is, what he done can't

hold a candle to what Grandfather Merriman done. That man just about run this town for years on end.'

"'I heard he did,' said Mame, short. 'Those was the days before things was called by their true names in politics and in graft and like that.'

"'I'm sure,' says Mis' Merriman, her voice slipping, 'Grandfather Merriman was an angel in heaven to his family. And he started the very Cemetery by bein' buried in it first himself, and he took a front lot —'

"'Ladies, ladies,' says Mis' Sykes, stern, 'we ain't votin' *yet*. Has anybody got anything else to offer? Let the discussion be free.'

"'What do we get a monument for, anyway?' says Mis' Toplady, hemming peaceful. 'Why don't we stick the money onto the new iron fence for Cemetery, same as we've been trying to do for years?'

"'That's what I was thinking,' says Abagail Arnold, smiling. 'Whenever I make one of my layer cakes for Sodality Annual, and frost it white and make mounds of frosted nuts on top, I always wish Cemetery had a fence around so's I could make a frosting one on the edge of the cake, appropriate.'

"'Why, but my land, Abagail,' says Mis' Holcomb, 'can't you see the differ'nce between

workin' for a dead iron fence and working for the real, right down Dead that once was the living? Where's your humanity, I'd like to know, and your loyalty to Friendship Village inhabitants that was, that you set the old iron fence over against 'em. What's a fence beside folks?'

"All this time Mis' Emmons, there in the front parlour, had just sat still, stitching away on some little garment or other, but now she looked up quick, as if she was going to speak. She even begun to speak with a 'Madame President' that covered up several excited beginnings. But as she done so, I looked through the folding doors and see her catch sight of somebody out in the street. And I looked out the bay-window in the back parlour and I see who it was: it was a man, carefully guiding a little bit of a man who was walking on the flat board top of the Sykes's fence. So, instead of speaking formal, all Mis' Emmons done was to make a little motion towards the window, so that her contribution to the debating was nothing but—

"'Madame President — look.'

"We all looked, them in the out-of-range corners of the room getting up and holding their work in their aprons, and peering past;

and us in the back parlour tried for glimpses out the side bay-window, past Mis' Sykes's big sword fern. And so the most of us see Insley walking with Christopher, who was footing it very delicate and grave, picking out his places to step as if a real lot depended on it.

"'That's Chris,' says Mis' Emmons, simple, 'that's come to us.' And you'd of said she hardly spoke the 'us' real conscious of herself. She looked round at us all. 'Let's have him in for a minute,' she says.

"'The little soul! Let's so do,' Mis' Amanda Toplady says, hearty.

"It was Mis' Emmons that went to the door and called them, and I guess Insley, when he see her, must of wondered what made her face seem like that. He went on up town, and the little chap come trotting up the walk.

"When Chris come in Mis' Sykes's front parlour among all the women, there run round that little murmuring sound that a crowd of women uses to greet the coming in their midst of any child. And I s'pose it was a little more so than ever for Chris, that they hadn't all seen yet — 'count of so few being out the night he come and 'count of his having been up to Proudfit House 'most ever since. Us in the back parlour went crowding in the front, and some

come down to the hall door to be the nearer. Mis' Amanda Toplady, hunting in her deep pocket, this time for a lozenger, says fervent above the rest:—

"'The little soul.'

"And he did resemble one, standing there so shy and manly in his new little brown clothes.

"Mis' Emmons's eyes was bright, and I thought I see a kind of challenge in her way of drawing the child towards her.

"'Chris,' she says, 'tell them what you had in your paper bag when you came to the church the other night.'

"Chris remembered: Sugar rolls and cream-puffs and fruit-cake, he recites it grand. 'My supper,' he adds, no less grand. 'But that was 'cause I didn't have my dinner nor my breakfast,' he explains, so's we wouldn't think he'd had too much at once.

"'What was the matter with your foot?' Mis' Emmons goes on.

"Christopher had a little smile that just about won you — a sort of abashed little smile, that begun over by one side of his mouth, and when he was going to smile that way he always started in by turning away his head. He done this now; but we could all hear what he said. It was:—

"'My biggest toe went right through a hole, an' it choked me awful.'

"About a child's foot hurting, or a little sore heel, there is something that makes mothers out of everybody, for a minute or two. The women all twittered into a little ripple of understanding. Probably to every woman there come the picture of the little cold, wet foot and the choked toe. I know I could see it, and I can see it yet.

"'Lambin',' says Mis' Toplady, in more than two syllables, 'come here for a peppermint.'

"Chris went right over to her. 'I been thirsty for a drink of water since all day,' he says confidential. 'Have you got one?'

"Mis' Toplady went with the child, and then Mis' Emmons took something from her bag and held it up. It was Christopher's father's letter that he'd brought with him that night.

"She read the letter out loud, in everybody's perfectly breathless silence that was broken only by Christopher laughing out in the kitchen. 'My friends,' Mis' Emmons says when she'd got through, 'doesn't it seem to you as if our work had come to us? And that if it isn't Chris himself, at least it ought to be people, live people — and not an iron fence or even a monument that will show from the railroad track?'

"And with that, standing in the doorway with my arms full of bedspread, I piped right up, just like I'd been longing to pipe up ever since that night at Mis' Emmons's when I'd talked with Insley:—

"'Yes, sir,' I says emphatic, 'it does. Without meaning to be sacrilegious in the least,' I says toward Mis' Sykes, 'I believe that the Dead is a lot better prepared to take care of themselves than a good many of the Living is.'

"There was a kind of a little pause at this, all but Mis' Sykes. Mis' Sykes don't pause easy. She spoke right back, sort of elevating one temple:—

"'The object of this meeting as the chair understands it,' says she, 'is to discuss money spending, *not* idees.'

"But I didn't pay no more attention than as if I'd been a speaker in public life. And Mis' Toplady and Christopher, coming back to the room just then, I spoke to him and took a-hold of his little shoulder.

"'Chris,' I says, 'tell 'em what you're going to be when you grow up.'

"The little boy stood up with his back against the door-casing, and he spoke back between peppermints:—

"'I'm going to drive the loads of hay,' he declares himself.

"'A little bit ago,' I says to 'em, 'he was going to be a cream-puff man, and keep a church and manufacture black velvet for people's coffins. Think of all them futures — not to spend time on other possibilities. Don't it seem like we'd ought to keep him around here somewheres and help him decide? Don't it seem like what he's going to be is resting with us?'

"But now Mis' Sykes spoke out in her most presidential tone.

"'It would be perfectly impossible,' she says, 'for Sodality to spend its money on the child or on anybody else that's living. Our constitution says we shall work for Cemetery.'

"'Well,' says I, rebellish, 'then let's rip up our old constitution and buy ourselves a new pattern.'

"Mis' Sykes was getting to verge on mad.

"'But Sodality ain't an orphan asylum, Calliope,' says she, 'nor none of us is that.'

"'Ain't we — ain't we, Mis' Sykes?' I says. 'Sometimes I donno what we're for if we ain't that.'

"And then I just clear forgot myself, in one of them times that don't let you get to sleep

that night for thinking about, and that when you wake up is right there by the bed waiting for you, and that makes you feel sore when you think of afterwards — sore, but glad, too.

"'That's it,' I says, 'that's it. I've been thinking about that a good deal lately. I s'pose it's because I ain't any children of my own to be so busy for that I can't think about their real good. Seems to me there ain't a child living no matter how saucy or soiled or similar, but could look us each one in the face and say, "What you doing for me and the rest of us?" And what could we say to them? We could say: "I'm buying some of you ginghams that won't shrink nor fade. Some of you I'm cooking food for, and some of you I'm letting go without it. And some of you I'm buying school books and playthings and some of you I'm leaving without 'em. I'm making up some of your beds and teaching you your manners and I'm loving you — some of you. And the rest of you I'm leaving walk in town after dark with a hole in your stocking." *Where's the line — where's the line?* How do we know which is the ones to do for? I tell you I'm the orphan asylum to the whole lot of 'em. And so are you. And I move the Cemetery Improvement Sodality do something for this

little boy. We'd adopt him if he was dead — an' keep his grave as nice and neat as wax. Let's us adopt him instead of his grave!'

"My bedspread had slipped down onto the floor, but I never knew when nor did I see it go. All I see was that some of them agreed with me — Mis' Emmons and Mis' Toplady and Mis' Hubbelthwait and Libby and even Mame that had proposed the monument. But some of the others was waiting as usual to see how Mis' Sykes was going to believe, and Mis' Sykes she was just standing there by the piano, her cheeks getting pinker and pinker up high on her face.

"'Calliope,' she said, making a gesture. 'Ladies! this is every bit of it out of order. This ain't the subject that we come together to discuss.'

"'It kind of seems to me,' says I, 'that it's a subject we was born to discuss.'

"Mis' Toplady sort of rolled over in her chair and looked across her glasses to Mis' Sykes.

"'Madame President,' says she, 'as I understand it this fits in all right. What we're proposing is to spend Sodality's money on this little boy just the same as though he was dead. I move we do so.'

"Two-three of 'em seconded it, but scairt and scattering.

"'Mis' Toplady,' says Mis' Sykes. 'Ladies! This is a good deal too headlong. A committee'd ought —'

"'Question — question,' demands Mis' Emmons, serene, and she met my eye and smiled some, in that little *we*-understand look that can pierce through a roomful of people like the wind.

"'Mis' Emmons,' says Mis' Sykes, wildish. 'Ladies! Sodality has been organized over twenty years, doing the same thing. You can't change so offhand —' You can't help admiring Mis' Sykes, for she simply don't know when she's beat. But this time she had a point with her, too. 'If we want to vote to amend the constitution,' she said, 'you've got to lay down your wishes on the table for one week.'

"'I daresay you have,' says Mis' Emmons, looking grave. 'Well, I move that we amend the constitution of this society, and I move that we do it next week at the open annual meeting of the Sodality.'

"'Second the motion,' says I, with my feet on my white bedspread.

"And somehow the phrase caught Christopher's ear, like a tune might to march by.

"'Second a motion — second a motion!' he chants to himself, standing by Mis' Toplady's knee.

VIII

"I HAD promised Insley to run in the Cadozas' after the meeting, and see the little boy; and Mis' Emmons having to go home before she started back to the Proudfits', Christopher walked along with me. When we got out to the end of Daphne Street, Insley overtook us on his way out to the Cadozas', too.

"His shoes were some muddy, and I guessed that he had been where of late he'd spent as much time as he could spare, both when he was in the village and when he was over to Indian Mound. Without digging down into his eyes, the same as some do to folks that's in trouble, I had sensed that there had come down on him everybody's hour of cutting something out of life, which is as elemental a thing to do as dying is, and I donno but it's the same kind as dying is besides. And he had been taking his hour in the elemental way, wanting to be alone and to kind of get near to the earth. I mean tramping the hills, ploughing along the narrow paths close to the barb' wire fences, plunging into the little groves. The little

groves have such an' I-know look of understanding all about any difficulty till you walk inside of them, when all to once they stop seeming to know about your special trouble and begin another kind of slow soothing, same as summing things up will soothe you, now and then.

"Chris chattered to him, lovable.

"'I had some peppermenges,' he says, 'and I like hot ice-cream, too. Don't you? Can you make that?' he inquires, slipping his hand in Insley's.

"Of course this made a pang — when you're hurt, 'most everything makes a pang. And this must of brought back that one evening with Robin that he would have to remember, and all the little stupid jokes they'd had that night must of rose up and hit at him, with the awful power of the little things that don't matter one bit and yet that matter everything.

"'What can *you* make, Chris?' Insley says to him. 'Can you make candy? And pull it — like this?'

"'Once a lady stirred me some an' cut it up in squares,' Chris explained, 'but I never did make any. My mama couldn't make candy, I guess, but she could make all other things — pancakes an' mittens an' nice stove fires my mama could make. The bag we got the salt

in — she made me two handkerchiefs out of that bag,' he ended proudly.

"'Did she — did she?' Insley tempted him on.

"'Yes,' Chris went on, hopping beside him, 'but now I've got to hurry an' be a man, 'cause litty boys ain't very good things. Can you make po'try?' he wound up.

"'Why, Chris — can you?' Insley asked.

"'Well, when I was comin' along with my daddy that night I made one,' the child says. And when Insley questions him a little he got this much more out of him. 'It started, "Look at the trees so green an' fair,"' he says, 'but I forget the rest.'

"'Do you want to be a poet when you grow up?' Insley ask' him.

"'Yes, I do,' the child says ready. 'I think I'll be that first an' then I'll be the President, too. But what I'd rather be is the sprinkler-cart man, wouldn't you?'

"'Conceivably,' Insley says, and by the look on his face I bet his hand tightened up on the child's hand.

"'At Sodality,' I says, 'he just told them he was going to drive loads of hay. He's made several selections.'

"He looked at me over the child's head, and

I guess we was both thinking the same thing: Trust nature to work this out alone? 'Conceivably,' again. But all of a sudden I know we both burned to help to do it. And as Insley talked to the child, I think some touch of his enterprise come back and breathed on him. In them few last days I shouldn't wonder if his work hadn't stopped soaring to the meaning of spirit and sunk down again to be just body drudgery. He couldn't ever help having his old possessing love of men, and his man's strong resolution to keep a-going, but I shouldn't wonder if the wings of the thing he meant to do had got folded up. And Christopher, here, was sort of releasing them out again.

"'How's the little Cadoza boy?' I ask' him pretty soon.

"'He's getting on,' he says. 'Dr. Barrows was down yesterday — he wants him for a fortnight or so at the hospital in town, where he can have good care and food. His mother doesn't want him to go. I hoped you'd talk with her.'

"Before we got to the Cadoza house Insley looked over to me, enigmatish. 'Want to see something?' he says, and he handed me a letter. I read it, and some of it I knew what it meant and some of it I didn't. It was from

Alex Proudfit, asking him up to Proudfit House to the house party.

". . . Ain't it astonishing how awful festive the word 'house party' sounds. 'Party' sounds festive, though not much more so than 'company' or 'gathering' that we use more common. 'Ball,' of course, is real glittering, and paints the inside of your head into pictures, instantaneous. But a house party — maybe it's because I never was to one; maybe it's because I never heard of one till late in life; maybe it's because nobody ever had one before in Friendship Village — but that word give me all the sensation that 'her golden coach' and 'his silver armour' and 'good fairy' used to have for me when I was a little girl. 'House party!' Anything shiny might happen to one of them. It's like you'd took something vanishin', like a party, and just seized onto it and made it stay longer than Time and the World ever intended. It's like making a business of the short-lived.

"Well, some of Alex's letter went about like this:—

"'Join us for the whole time, do,' it says, and it went on about there being rather an interesting group, — 'a jolly individualist,' I recollect he says, 'for your special benefit.

He'll convert you where I couldn't, because he's kept his love for men and I haven't. And of course I've some women — pretty, bless them, and thank the Lord not one of them troubling whether she loves mankind or not, so long as men love her. And there you have Nature uncovered at her task! I shall expect you for every moment that you can spare. . . .' I remember the wording because it struck me it was all so like Alex that I could pretty near talk to it and have it answer back.

"'Tell me,' Insley says, when I handed the letter back to him, 'you know — him. Alex Proudfit. Does he put all that on? Is it his mask? Does he feel differently and do differently when folks don't know?'

"'Well,' I says, slow, 'I donno. He gives the Cadozas their rent, but when Mis' Cadoza went to thank him, once, he sent down word for her to go and see his agent.'

"He nodded, and I'd never heard him speak bitter before. 'That's it,' he says, 'that's it. That's the way we bungle things. . . .'

"We'd got almost to the Cadozas' when we heard an automobile coming behind us, and as we stood aside to let it go by, Robin's face flashed past us at the window. Mis' Emmons

was with her, that Robin had come down after. Right off the car stopped and Robin jumped out and come hurrying back towards us. I'll never forget the minute. We met right in front of the old tumble-down Cadoza house with the lilacs so high in the front yard that the place looked pretty near nice, like the rest of the world. It was a splendid afternoon, one that had got it's gold persuaded to burst through a gray morning, like colour from a bunch of silver buds; and now the air was all full of lovely things, light and little wind and late sun and I donno but things we didn't know about. And everyone of them seemed in Robin's face as she came towards us, and more, too, that we couldn't name or place.

"I think the mere exquisite girlishness of her come home to Insley as even her strength and her womanliness, that night he talked with her, had not moved him. I donno but in the big field of his man's dream, he had pretty near forgot how obvious her charm was. I'm pretty sure that in those days when he was tramping the hills alone, the thing that he was fighting with was that he was going to lose her companioning in the life they both dreamed. But now her hurrying so and her little faint agitation made her appeal a new thing, fifty times as

lovely, fifty times as feminine, and sort of filling in the picture of herself with all the different kinds of women she was in one.

"So now, as he stood there with her, looking down in her face, touching her friendly hand, I think that was the first real, overhauling minute when he was just swept by the understanding that his loss was so many times what he'd thought it was going to be. For it was her that he wanted, it was her that he would miss for herself and not for any dear plans of work-fellowship alone. She understood his dream, but there was other things she understood about, too. A man can love a woman for a whole collection of little dear things — and he can lose her and grieve; he can love her for her big way of looking at things, and he can lose her and grieve; he can love her because she is his work-fellow, and he can lose her and grieve. But if, on top of one of these, he loves her because she is she, the woman that knows about life and is capable of sharing all of life with him and of being tender about it, why then if he loses her, his grieving is going to be something that there ain't rightly no name for. And I think it was that minute there in the road that it first come to Insley that Robin was Robin, that of all the many women that she

was, first and most she was the woman that was capable of sharing with him all sides of living.

"'I wanted . . .' she says to him, uncertain. 'Oh, I wish very much that you would accept the invitation to some of the house party. I wanted to tell you.'

"'I can't do that,' he answers, short and almost gruff. 'Really I can't do that.'

"But it seemed there was even a sort of nice childishness about her that you wouldn't have guessed. I always think it's a wonderful moment when a woman knows a man well enough to show some of her childishness to him. But a woman that shows right off, close on the heels of an introduction, how childish she can be, it always sort o' makes me mad — like she'd told her first name without being asked about it.

"'Please,' Robin says, 'I'm asking it because I wish it very much. I want those people up there to know you. I want —'

"He shook his head, looking at her, eyes, mouth, and fresh cheeks, like he wished he was able to look at her face *all at once*.

"'At least, at least,' she says to him rapid, then, 'you must come to the party at the end. You know I want to keep you for my friend

— I want to make you our friend. That night Aunt Eleanor is going to announce my engagement, and I want my friends to be there.'

"That surprised me as much as it did him. Nobody in the village knew about the engagement yet except us two that knew it from that night at Mis' Emmons's. I wondered what on earth Insley was going to say and I remember how I hoped, pretty near fierce, that he wasn't going to smile and bow and wish her happiness and do the thing the world would have wanted of him. It may make things run smoother to do that way, but smoothness isn't the only thing the love of folks for folks knows about. I do like a man that now and then speaks out with the breath in his lungs and not just with the breath of his nostrils. And that's what Insley done — that's what he done, only I'm bound to say that I do think he spoke out before he knew he was going to.

"'That would be precisely why I couldn't come,' he said. 'Thank you, you know — but please don't ask me.'

"As for Robin, at this her eyes widened, and beautiful colour swept her face. And she didn't at once turn away from him, but I see how she stood looking at him with a kind of a sharp intentness, less of wonder than of stopping short.

"Christopher had run to the automobile and now he come a-hopping back.

"'Robin!' he called. 'Aunt Eleanor says you haf to be in a dress by dinner, and it's *now*.'

"'Do come for dinner, Mr. Insley,' Mis' Emmons calls, as Robin and Christopher went to join him. 'We've got up a tableau or two for afterward. Come and help me be a tableau.'

"He smiled and shook his head and answered her. And that reminded me that I'd got to hurry like wild, as usual. It was most six o'clock then, — it always *is* either most six o'clock or most noon when I get nearest to being interested, — and that night great things was going to be going on. Mis' Sykes and Mis' Toplady and the School Board and I was going to have a tableau of our own.

"But for all that I couldn't help standing still a minute and looking after the automobile. It seemed as bad as some kind of a planet, carrying Robin off for forever and ever. And I wasn't so clear that I fancied its orbit.

"'I've got a whole string of minds not to go to that party myself,' I says, meditative.

"But Insley never answered. He just come on around the Cadozas' house.

IX

"I NEVER speak much about my relations, because I haven't got many. If I did have, I suppose I should be telling about how peculiar they take their tea and coffee, and what they died of, and showing samples of their clothes and acting like my own immediate family made up life, just like most folks does. But I haven't got much of any relatives, nor no ancestors to brag about. 'Nothing for kin but the world,' I always say.

"But back in the middle of June I had got a letter from a cousin, like a bow from the blue. And the morning I got it, and with it yet unopened in my hand, Silas Sykes come out from behind the post-office window and tapped me on the arm.

"'Calliope,' he says, 'we've about made up our minds — the School Board an' some o' the leadin' citizens has — to appoint a Women's Evenin' Vigilance Committee, secret. An' we want you an' Mis' Toplady an' Mis' Sykes should be it.'

"'Vigilance,' I says, thoughtful. 'I recollect missin' on the meanin' of that word in school. I recollect I called it "viligance" an' said it meant a 'bus. I donno if I rightly know what it means now, Silas.'

"Silas cleared his throat an' whispered hoarse, in a way he's got: 'Women don't have no call, much for the word,' he says. 'It means when you sic your notice onto some one thing. We want a committee of you women should do it.'

"'Notice *what?*' I says, some mystified. 'What the men had ought to be up to an' ain't?'

"But customers come streaming into the post-office store then, and some folks for their mail, and Silas set a time a couple o' days later in the afternoon for Mis' Toplady and Mis' Sykes and me to come down to the store and talk it over.

"'An' you be here,' says Silas, beatin' it off with his finger. 'It's somethin' we got to do to protect our own public decency.'

"'*Public* decency,' I says over, thoughtful, and went out fingerin' my letter that was in a strange handwriting and that I was dying to read.

"It was a couple of days later that I what-you-might-say finished that letter, and between times I had it on the clock-shelf and give every

spare minute to making it out. Minerva Beach the letter was from — my cousin Minnie Beach's girl. Minnie had died awhile before, and Minerva, her daughter, was on her way West to look for a position, and should she spend a few days with me? That was what I made out, though I donno how I done it, for her writing was so big and so up-and-down that every letter looked like it had on corsets and high heels. I never see such a mess! It was like picking out a crochet pattern to try to read it.

"I recollect that I was just finishing composing my letter telling her to come along, and hurrying so's to take it to mail as I went down to the Vigilance Committee meeting, when the new photographer in town come to my door, with his horse and buggy tied to the gate. J. Horace Myers was his name, and he said he was a friend of the Topladys, and he was staying with them while he made choice art photographs of the whole section; and he wanted to take a picture of my house. He was a dapper little man, but awful tired-seeming, so I told him to take the picture and welcome, and I put the stone dog on the front porch and looped the parlour curtains over again and started off for the meeting.

"'I'll be up to show you the proofs in a few days,' he says as I was leaving. He was fixing the black cloth over his head, kind of listless and patient.

"'Land!' I says, before I knew it, 'don't you get awful sick of takin' pictures of humbly houses you don't care nothin' about?'

"He peeked out from under the black cloth sort of grateful. 'I do,' he says, simple, — 'sick enough to bust the camera.'

"'Well, I should think you would,' I says hearty; and I went down Daphne Street with the afternoon kind of feeling tarnished. I was wondering how on earth folks go on at all that dislikes their work like that. There was Abe Luck, just fixing the Sykes's eaves-trough — what was there to *like* about fixing eaves-troughs and about the whole hardware business? Jimmy Sturgis coming driving the 'bus, Eppleby Holcomb over there registering deeds, Mis' Sykes's girl Em'ly washing windows, — what was there about any of it to *like* doing? I looked at Mis' Sykes's Em'ly real pitying, polishing panes outside, when Abe Luck come climbing down the ladder from the roof; and all of a sudden I see Abe stick his head through the rungs, and quick as a flash kiss Mis' Sykes's Em'ly.

"'My land!' I started to think, 'Mis' Sykes had ought to discharge —' and then I just stopped short off, sudden. Her hating windows, and him hating eaves-troughs, and what else did either of them have? Nothing. I could sense their lives like I could sense my own — level and even and *darn*. And all at once I had all I could do to keep from being glad that Abe Luck had kissed Em'ly. And I walked like lightning to keep back the feeling.

"Mis' Sykes and Mis' Toplady was to the post-office store before me. It was a slack time of day, and Silas set down on a mail-bag and begun outlining the situation that he meant about.

"'The School Board,' says Silas, important, 'has got some women's work they want done. It's a thing,' s'he, 'that women can do the best — I mean it's the girls an' boys, hangin' round evenin's — you know we've all talked about it. But somebody's got to get after 'em in earnest, an' see they don't disgrace us with their carryin' on in the streets, evenin's.'

"'Why don't the men do it?' I ask' him, wonderin', 'or is it 'count of offending some?'

"'No such thing!' says Silas, touchy. 'Where's your delicate feelin's, Calliope? Women can do these things better than men.

This is somethin' delicate, that had ought to be seen to quiet. It ain't a matter for the authorities. It's women's work,' says he. 'It's women that's the mothers — it ain't the men,' says Silas, convincing.

"But still I looked at him, real meditative. 'What started you men off on that tack at this time?' I ask' him, blunt — because young folks had been flooding the streets evenings since I could remember, and no Friendship Village man had ever acted like this about it.

"'Well,' says Silas, 'don't you women tell it out around. But the thing that's got us desperate is the schoolhouse. The entry to it — they've used it shameful. Peanut shucks, down-trod popcorn, paper bags, fruit peelin's — every mornin' the stone to the top o' the steps, under the archway, is full of 'em. An' last week the Board went up there early mornin' to do a little tinkerin', an' there set three beer bottles, all empty. So we've figgered on puttin' some iron gates up to the schoolhouse entry an' appointin' you women a Vigilance Committee to help us out.'

"We felt real indignant about the schoolhouse. It stands up a little slope, and you can see it from 'most anywheres daytimes, and we all felt kind of an interest — though

of course the School Board seemed to own it special.

"Mis' Toplady looked warm and worried. 'But what is it you want we should do, Silas?' she ask', some irritable. 'I've got my hands so full o' my own family it don't seem as if I could vigilance for nobody.'

"'S-h-h, Mis' Toplady. *I* think it's a great trust,' says Mis' Silas Sykes.

"'It is a great trust,' says Silas, warm, 'to get these young folks to stop gallivantin' an' set home where they belong.'

"'How you going to get them to set home, Silas?' I ask', some puzzled.

"'Well,' says Silas, 'that's where they ought to be, ain't it?'

"'Why,' I says thoughtful, 'I donno's they had.'

"'*What?*' says Silas, with horns on the word. 'What say, Calliope?'

"'How much settin' home evenings did you do when you was young, Silas?' I says.

"'I'd 'a' been a long sight better off if I'd 'a' done more of it,' says Silas.

"'However that is, you *didn't* set home,' I says back at him. 'Neither will young folks set there now, I don't believe.'

"'Well,' says Silas, '*anyhow*, they've got to

get off'n the streets. We've made up our minds to that. They can't set on steps nor in stairways down town, nor in entries, nor to the schoolhouse. We've got to look out for public decency.'

"'*Public* decency,' says I, again. 'They can do what they like, so's public decency ain't injured, I s'pose, Silas?'

"'No such thing!' shouts Silas. 'Calliope, take shame! Ain't we doin' our best to start 'em right?'

"'That's what I donno,' I answers him, troubled. 'Driving folks around don't never seem to me to be a real good start towards nowheres.'

"Mis' Amanda Toplady hitched forward in her chair and spoke for the first time — ponderous and decided, but real sweet, too. 'What I think is this,' she says. 'They won't set home, as Calliope says. And when we've vigilanced 'em off the streets, where are we goin' to vigilance 'em *to?*'

"'That ain't our lookout,' says Silas.

"'Aint' it?' says Mis' Toplady. '*Ain't it?*' She set thinking for a minute and then her face smoothed. 'Anyhow,' she says, comfortable, 'us ladies'll vigilance awhile. It ain't clear in my mind yet what to do. But we'll do it, I guess.'

"We made up that we three should come down town one night that week and look around and see what we see. We all knew — every woman in Friendship Village knew — how evenings, the streets was full of young folks, loud talking and loud laughing and carrying on. We'd all said to each other, helpless, that we *wisht* something could be done, but that was as far as anybody'd got. So we made it up that we three should be down town in a night or two, so's to get our ideas started, and Silas was to have Timothy Toplady and Eppleby Holcomb, that's on the School Board, down to the store so we could all talk it over together afterwards. But still I guess we all felt sort of vague as to what we was to drive *at*.

"'It seems like Silas wanted us to unwind a ball o' string from the middle out,' says Mis' Toplady, uneasy, when we'd left the store.

"A few days after that Minerva come. I went down to the depot to meet her, and I would of reco'nized her anywheres, she looked so much like her handwriting. She was dressed sort of tawdry swell. She had on a good deal. But out from under her big hat with its cheap plume that was goin' to shed itself all over the house, I see her face was little and young and some pretty and excited. Excited about life

and new things and moving around. I liked her right off. 'Land!' thinks I, 'you'll try me to death. But, you poor, nice little thing, you can if you want to.'

"I took her home to supper. She talked along natural enough, and seemed to like everything she et, and then she wiped the dishes for me, and looked at herself in the clock looking-glass all the while she was doing it. Then, when I'd put out the milk bottles, we locked up the back part of the house and went and set in the parlour.

"I'd always thought pretty well of my parlour. It hasn't anything but a plush four-piece set and an ingrain and Nottinghams, but it's the *parlour*, and I'd liked it. But when we'd been setting there a little while, and I'd asked her about everybody, and showed her their pictures in the album, all of a sudden it seemed as if they wasn't anything to *do* in the parlour. Setting there and talking was nice, but I missed something. And I thought of this first when Minerva got up and walked kind of aimless to the window.

"'How big is Friendship Village?' she ask'.

"I told her, real proud.

"'They can't be a great deal goin' on here, is they?' she says.

"'Land, yes!' I says. 'We're so busy we're nearly dead. Ladies' Aid, Ladies' Missionary, Cemetery Improvement Sodality, the rummage sale coming on, the bazaar, and I donno what all.'

"'Oh,' she says, vague. 'Well — is they many young people?'

"And when I'd told her, 'Quite a few,' she didn't say anything more — but just stood looking down the street. And pretty soon I says, 'Land! the parlour's kind o' stuffy to-night. Let's go out in the yard.' And when we'd walked around out there a minute, smelling in my pinks, I thought, 'Land! it's kind o' dreary doin' this,' an' I says to her all of a sudden, 'Let's go in the house and make some candy.'

"'Oh, *let's*,' she says, like a little girl.

"We went back in and lit the kitchen fire, and made butter-scotch — she done it, being real handy at it. She livened up and flew around and joked some, and the kitchen looked nice and messy and *used*, and we had a real good time. And right in the midst of it there come a rap at the side door and there stood the dapper, tired-looking little photograph man, J. Horace Myers, seeming as discouraged as he could.

"We spread out the proofs of the pictures of my house and spent some time deciding. And while we was deciding, he showed us some more pictures that he'd made of the town, and talked a little about them. He was a real pleasant, soft-spoken man, and he knew how to laugh and when to do it. He see the funny in things — he see that the post-office looked like a rabbit with its ears up; he see that the engine-house looked like it was lifting its eyebrows; and he see the pretty in things, too — he showed us a view or two he'd took around Friendship Village just for the fun of it. One was Daphne Street, by the turn, and he says: 'It looks like a deep tunnel, don't it? An' like you wanted to go down it?' He was a wonderful nice, neutral little man, and I enjoyed looking at his pictures.

"But Minerva — I couldn't help watching her. She wasn't so interested in the pictures, and she wasn't so quick at seeing the funny in things, nor the pretty, either; but even the candy making hadn't livened her up the way that little talking done. She acted real easy and told some little jokes; and when the candy was cool, she passed him some; and I thought it was all right to do. And he sort of spruced up and took notice and quit being so down-in-the-mouth. And I thought, 'Land! ain't it funny how just

being together makes human beings, be they agent or be they cousin, more themselves than they was before!'

"Her liking company made me all the more sorry to leave Minerva alone that next evening, that was the night Mis' Sykes and Mis' Toplady and I was due to a tableau of our own in the post-office store. It was the night when the Vigilance Committee was to have its first real meeting with the School Board. But I lit the lamp for Minerva in the parlour, and give her the day's paper, and she had her sewing, and when Mis' Toplady and Mis' Sykes come for me, I went off and left her setting by the table. My parlour had been swept that day, and it was real tidy and quiet and lamp-lit; and yet when Mis' Toplady and Mis' Sykes and I stepped out into the night, all smelling of pinks and a new moon happening, and us going on that mission we wasn't none of us sure what it was, the dark and the excitement sort of picked me up and I felt like I never felt in my parlour in my life — all kind of young and free and springy.

"'Let's us walk right down through town first,' says Mis' Toplady. 'That's where the young folks gets to, seems though.'

"'Well-a, I don't see the necessity of that,' says Mis' Sykes. 'We've all three done that

again and again. We know how it is down there evenings.'

"'But,' says Mis' Toplady, in her nice, stubborn way, 'let's us, anyway. I know, when I walk through town nights, I'm 'most always hurrying to get my yeast before the store shuts, an' I never half look around. To-night let's *look*.'

"Well, we looked. Along by the library windows in some low stone ledges. In front of a store or two they was some more. Around the corner was a place where they was some new tombstones piled up, waiting for their folks. And half a block down was the canal bridge. And ledges and bridge and tombstones and streets was alive with girls and boys — little young things, the girls with their heads tied in bright veils and pretty ribbons on them, and their laughs just shrilling and thrilling with the sheer fun of *hanging around* on a spring night.

"'Land!' says Mis' Sykes, '*what* is their mothers thinkin' of?'

"But something else was coming home to me.

"'I dunno,' I says, kind of scairt at the way I felt, 'if I had the invite, this spring night, all pinks and new moons, I donno but I'd go and hang over a tombstone with 'em!'

"'Calliope!' says Mis' Sykes, sharp. But Mis'

Toplady, she kind of chuckled. And the crowd jostled us — more young folks, talking and laughing and calling each other by nicknames, and we didn't say no more till we got up in the next block.

"There's a vacant store there up towards the wagon shop, and a house or two, and that's where the open stairways was that Silas meant about. Everything had been shut up at six o'clock, and there, sure as the world, 'most every set of steps and every stairway had its couple, sitting and laughing and talking, like the place was differ'nt sofas in a big drawing-room, or rocks on a seashore, or like that.

"'Mercy!' says Mis' Sykes. 'Such goin'-ons! Such bringin'-ups!'

"Just then I recollect I heard a girl laugh out, pretty and pleased, and I thought I recognized Mis' Sykes's Em'ly's voice, and I thought I knew Abe Luck's answering — but I never said a word to Mis' Sykes, because I betted she wouldn't get a step farther than discharging Em'ly, and I was after more steps than that. And besides, same minute, I got the scent of the Bouncing Bet growing by the wagon shop; and right out of thin air, and acrost more years than I like to talk about, come the quick little feeling that made me know the fun, the sheer *fun*, that

Em'ly thought she was having and that she had the right to.

"'Oh, well, whoever it is, maybe they're engaged,' says Mis' Toplady, soothin'.

"'Oh, but the bad taste!' says Mis' Sykes, shuddering. Mis' Sykes is a good cook and a good enough mother, and a fair-to-middling housekeeper, but she looks hard on the fringes and the borders of this life, and to her 'good taste' is both of them.

"They wasn't nobody on the wagon shop steps, for a wonder, and we set down there for a minute to talk it over. And while Mis' Toplady and Mis' Sykes was having it out between them, I set there a-thinking. And all of a sudden the night sort of stretched out and up, and I almost felt us little humans crawling around on the bottom of it. And one little bunch of us was Friendship Village, and in Friendship Village some of us was young. I kind of saw the whole throng of them — the *young* humans that would some day be the village. There they was, bottled up in school all day, or else boxed in a store or a factory or somebody's kitchen, and when night come, and summer come, and the moon come — land, land! they *wanted* something, all of them, and they didn't know what they wanted.

"And what had they got? There was the streets stretching out in every direction, each house with its parlour — four-piece plush set, mebbe, and ingrain and Nottinghams, and mebbe not even that, and mebbe the rest of the family flooding the room, anyway. And what was the parlour, even with somebody to set and talk to them — what was the parlour, compared to the *magic* they was craving and couldn't name? The feeling young and free and springy, and the wanting somehow to express it? Something to do, somewheres to go, something to see, somebody to be with and laugh with — no wonder they swept out into the dark in numbers, no wonder they took the night as they could find it. They didn't have no hotel piazza of their own, no boat-rides, no seashore, no fine parties, no automobiles — no nothing but the big, exciting dark that belongs to us all together. No wonder they took it for their own.

"Why, Friendship Village was no more than a great big ball-room with these young folks leaving the main floor and setting in the alcoves, to unseen music. If the alcoves had been all palms and expense and dressed-up chaperons on the edges, everything would of seemed right. As it was, it was all a danger that made my heart ache for them, and for us all. And yet it come

from their same longing for fun, for joy — and where was they to get it?

"'Oh, ladies!' I says, out of the fulness of the lump in my throat, 'if only we had some place to invite 'em to!'

"'They wouldn't come if we had,' says Mis' Sykes, final.

"'Not come!' I says. 'With candy making and pictures and music and mebbe dancin'? Not come!'

"'Dancin'!' says Mis' Toplady, low. 'Oh, Calliope, I donno as I'd go that far.'

"'We've went farther than that long ago,' I says, reckless. 'We've went so far that the dangers of dancin' would be safe beside the dangers of what is.'

"'But we ain't responsible for that,' says Mis' Sykes.

"'Ain't we — *ain't we?*' I says, like Mis' Toplady had. 'Mis' Sykes, how much does Silas rent the post-office hall for, a night?'

"'Ten dollars, if he makes something; and five dollars at cost,' she says.

"'That's it,' I says, groaning. 'We never could afford that, even to ask them in once a week. Oh, we'd ought to have some place open every night for them, and us ladies take turns doing the refreshments; but they ain't no place in town that belongs to young folks —'

"And all of a sudden I stopped, like an idee had took me from all four sides of my head at once.

"'Why, ladies,' I says, 'look at the schoolhouse, doing nothing every night out of the year and *built* for the young folks!'

"'Oh, well,' says Mis' Sykes, superior, 'you know the Board'd never allow 'em to use the schoolhouse *that* way. The Board wouldn't think of it!'

"'*Whose* Board?' says I, stern. 'Ain't they our Board? Yours and mine and Friendship Village's? Come on — come on and put it to 'em,' I says, kind o' wild.

"I was climbing down the steps while I spoke. And we all went down, me talking on, and Mis' Toplady catching fire on the minute, an' Mis' Sykes holding out like she does unless so be she's thought of an idea herself. But oh, Mis' Toplady, she's differ'nt.

"'Goodness alive!' she said, 'why ain't some of us thought o' that before? Ain't it the funniest thing, the way folks can have a way out right under their noses, an' not sense it?'

"I had never had a new-born notion come into my head so ready-made. I could hardly talk it fast enough, and Mis' Toplady same way, and we hurried back to the post-office store, Mis' Sykes

not convinced but keeping still because us two talked it so hard.

"Silas and Timothy and Eppleby Holcomb was setting in the back part of the post-office store waiting for us, and Mis' Toplady and I hurried right up to them.

"'You tell, Calliope,' says Mis' Toplady. 'It's your idee.'

"But first we both told, even Mis' Sykes joining in, shocked, about the doorway carryin' ons and all the rest. 'Land, land!' Mis' Toplady says, 'I never had a little girl. I lost my little girl baby when she was eleven months. But I ain't never felt so like *shieldin'* her from somethin' as I feel to-night.'

"'It's awful, awful!' says Timothy Toplady, decided. 'We've just got to get some law goin', that's all.'

"Silas agreed, scowling judicial. 'We been talkin' curfew,' he says. 'I donno but we'll hev to get the curfew on 'em.'

"'Curfew!' says I. 'So you're thinking of curfewin' 'em off the streets. Will you tell me, Silas Sykes, where you're going to curfew 'em *to?*'

"'Yes,' says Mis' Toplady, 'that's what I meant about vigilancin' 'em off somewheres. *Where to?* What say, Silas?'

"'That ain't our concern, woman!' shouts Silas, exasperated by us harping on the one string. 'Them young folks has all got one or more parents. Leave 'em use 'em.'

"'Yes, indeed,' says Mis' Sykes, nodding once, with her eyes shut brief. 'An' young people had ought to be encouraged to do evening studyin'.'

"Mis' Toplady jerked her head sideways. 'Evenin' fiddlestick!' she snaps, direct. 'If you've got a young bone left in your body, Mis' Sykes,' says she, 'you know you're talkin' nonsense.'

"'Ain't you no idees about how well-bred young ladies should conduct themselves?' says Mis' Sykes, in her most society way.

"'I donno so much about well-bred young ladies,' says Mis' Toplady, frank. 'I was thinkin' about just girls. Human girls. An' boys the same.'

"'Me, too,' I says, fervent.

"'What you goin' to *do?*' says Silas, spreading out his hands stiff and bowing his knees. 'What's your idee? You've got to have a workin' idee for this thing, same as the curfew is.'

"'Oh, Silas,' I says then, 'that's what we've got — that's what we've got. Them poor young things wants a good time — same as you and all

of us did, and same as we do yet. Why not give 'em a place to meet and be together, normal and nice, and some of us there to make it pleasant for 'em?'

"'Heh!' says Silas. 'You talk like a dook. Where you goin' to *get* a place for 'em? Hire the opery-house, air ye?'

"'No, sir,' I says to him. 'Give 'em the place that's theirs. Give 'em the schoolhouse, open evenings, an' all lit up an' music an' things doin'.'

"'My Lord heavens!' says Silas, that's an elder in the church and ain't no more control of his tongue than a hen. 'Air you crazy, Calliope Marsh? Plump, stark, starin' ravin' — why, woman alive, who's goin' to donate the light an' the coal? *You?*'

"'I thought mebbe the building and the School Board, too, was *for* the good o' the young folks,' I says to him, sharp.

"'So it is,' says Silas, 'it's for their *good*. It ain't for their foolishness. Can't you see daylight, Calliope?'

"'Is arithmetic good an' morals *not*, Silas Sykes?' I says.

"Then Timothy Toplady let loose: 'A schoolbuildin', Calliope,' s'he, — 'why, it's a dignified place. They must respect it, same as they would

a church. Could you learn youngsters the Constitution of the United States in a room where they'd just been cookin' up cough drops an' hearin' dance tunes?'

"'Well,' says I, calm, 'if you can't, I'd leave the Constitution of the United States *go*. If it's that delicate,' I says back at him, 'gimme the cough drops.'

"'You're talkin' treason,' says Silas, hoarse.

"Timothy groans. '*Dancin!*' he says. 'Amanda,' he says, 'I hope you ain't sunk so low as Calliope?'

"Mis' Toplady wavered a little. She's kind of down on dancing herself. 'Well,' she says, 'anyhow, I'd fling some place open and invite 'em in for *somethin'*.'

"'*I* ain't for this, Silas,' says Mis' Sykes, righteous. '*I* believe the law is the law, and we'd best use it. Nothin' we can do is as good as enforcin' the dignity of the law.'

"'Oh, *rot!*' says Eppleby Holcomb, abrupt. Eppleby hadn't been saying a word. But he looked up from the wood-box where he was setting, and he wrinkled up his eyes at the corners the way he does — it wasn't a real elegant word he picked, but I loved Eppleby for that 'rot.' 'Asking your pardon, Mis' Sykes,' he says, 'I ain't got so much confidence in enforcin' the law

as I've got in edgin' round an' edgin' round accordin' to your cloth — an' your pattern. An' your pattern.'

"'Lord heavens!' says Silas, looking glassy, 'if this was Roosia, you an' Calliope'd both be hoofin' it hot-foot for Siberia.'

"Well, it was like arguing with two trees. They wasn't no use talking to either Silas or Timothy. I forget who said what last, but the meeting broke up, after a little, some strained, and we hadn't decided on anything. Us ladies had vigilanced one night to about as much purpose as mosquitoes humming. And I said good night to them and went on up street, wondering why God lets a beautiful, burning plan come waving its wings in your head and your heart if he don't intend you to make a way for yourself to use it.

"Then, by the big evergreens a block or so from my house, I heard somebody laugh — a little, low, nice, soft, sort of foolish laugh, a woman's laugh, and a man's voice joined in with it, pleasant and sort of singing. I was right onto them before they see me.

"'I thought it was a lonesome town,' says somebody, 'but I guess it ain't.'

"And there, beside of me, sitting on the rail fence under the evergreens, was Minerva Beach,

my own cousin, and the little, tired photograph-taking man. I had just bare time to catch my breath and to sense where the minute really belonged — that's always a good thing to do, ain't it? — and then I says, cool as you please:

"'Hello, Minerva! My! ain't the night grand? I don't wonder you couldn't stay in the house. How do, Mr. Myers? I was just remembering my lemon-pie that won't be good if it sets till to-morrow. Come on in and let's have it, and make a little lemonade.'

"Ordinarily, I think it's next door to immoral to eat lemon-pie in the evening; but I had to think quick, and it was the only thing like a party that I had in the butt'ry. Anyhow, I was planning bigger morals than ordinary, too.

"Well, sir, I'd been sure before, but that made me certain sure. There had been my parlour and my porch, and them two young people was welcome to them both; but they wanted to *go* somewheres, natural as a bird wanting to fly or a lamb to caper. And there I'd been living in Friendship Village for sixty years or so, and I'd reco'nized the laws of housekeeping and debt paying and grave digging and digestion, and I'd never once thought of this, that's as big as them all.

"Ain't it nice the way God has balanced

towns! He never puts in a Silas Sykes that he don't drop in an Eppleby Holcomb somewheres to undo what the Silases does. It wasn't much after six o'clock the next morning, and I was out after kindling, when they come a shadow in the shed door, and there was Eppleby. He had a big key in his hand.

"'I'm a-goin' to the City, Calliope,' says he. 'Silas an' Timothy an' I are a-goin' up to the City on the Dick Dasher' (that's our daily accommodation train, named for the engineer). 'Silas and Timothy is set on buying the iron gates for the schoolhouse entry, an' I'm goin' along. He put the key in my hand, meditative. 'We won't be back till the ten o'clock Through,' he says, 'an' I didn't know but you might want to get in the schoolhouse for somethin' to-night — you an' Mis' Toplady.'

"I must of stood staring at him, but he never changed expression.

"'The key had ought to be left with some one, you know,' he says. 'I'm leavin' it with you. You go ahead. I'll go snooks on the blame. Looks like it was goin' to be another nice day, don't it?' he says, casual, and went off down the path.

"For a minute I just stood there, staring down at the key in my hand. And then, 'Eppleby,' I

sings after him, 'oh, Eppleby,' I says, 'I feel just like I was going to *crow!*'

"I don't s'pose I hesitated above a minute. That is, my head may have hesitated some, like your head will, but my heart went right on ahead. I left my breakfast dishes standing — a thing I do for the very few — and I went straight for Mis' Toplady. And she whips off her big apron and left *her* dishes standing, an' off we went to the half a dozen that we knew we could depend on — Abagail Arnold, that keeps the home bakery, Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss, Mis' Fire Chief Merriman, that's going to be married again and has got real human towards other folks, like she wasn't in her mourning grief — we told 'em the whole thing. And we one and all got together and we see that here was something that could be done, right there and then, so be we was willing to make the effort, big enough and unafraid.

"When I remember back, that day is all of a whirl to me. We got the notice in the daily paper bold as a lion, that there would be a party to the schoolhouse that night, free to everybody. We posted the notice everywheres, and sent it out around by word of mouth. And when we'd gone too far to go back, we walked in on Mis' Sykes — all but Abagail, that had

pitched in to making the cakes — and we told her what we'd done, so she shouldn't have any of the blame.

"She took it calm, not because calm is Christian, I bet, but because calm is grand lady.

"'It's what I always said,' says she, 'would be the way, if the women run things.'

"'Women don't run things,' says Mis' Toplady, placid, 'an' I hope to the land they never will. But I believe the time'll come when men an' women'll run 'em together, like the Lord meant, an' when women can see that they're mothers to all men an' not just to their little two-by-four families.'

"'My duty to men is in my own home,' says Mis' Sykes, regal.

"'So is mine,' says Mis' Toplady, 'for a beginning. But it don't stop in my wood box nor my clothes-basket nor yet in my mixin'-bowl.'

"We went off and left her — it's almost impossible to federate Mis' Sykes into anything. And we went up to the building and made our preparations. And then we laid low for the evening, to see what it would bring.

"I was putting on my hat that night in front of the hall-tree looking-glass when J. Horace Myers come up on the front porch to call for Minerva. He was all dressed up, and she come

downstairs in a little white dimity she had, trimmed with lace that didn't cost much of anything, and looking like a picture. They sat down on the porch for a little, and I heard them talking while I was hunting one o' my gloves.

"'Ain't it the dandiest night!' says J. Horace Myers.

"'Ain't it!' says Minerva. 'I should say. My! I'm glad I come to this town!'

"'I'm awful glad you did, too,' says J. Horace. 'I thought first it was awful lonesome here, but I guess —'

"'They're goin' to have music to-night,' says Minerva, irrelevant.

"'Cricky!' says the little photograph man.

"Minerva had her arm around a porch post and she sort of swung back and forth careless, and — 'My!' she said, 'I just do love to *go*. Have you ever travelled anywheres?'

"'Texas an' through there,' he says. 'I'm goin' again some day, when —'

"'I'm goin' West now,' says Minerva. 'I just can't stand it long in one place, unless,' she added, 'it's *awful* nice.'

"I'd found my glove, but I recollect I stood still, staring out the door. I see it like I never see it before — *They was living*. Them two young things out there on my porch, and all the

young folks of Friendship Village, they was just living — trying to find a future and a life of their own. They didn't know it. They thought what they wanted was a good time, like the pioneers thought they wanted adventure. But here they were, young pioneers of new villages, flocking together wherever they could, seeking each other out, just living. And us that knew, us that had had life, too, or else had missed it, we was just letting them live, haphazard. And us that had ought to of been mothers to the town young, no less than to our own young, had been leaving them live alone, on the streets and stairways and school entries of Friendship Village.

"I know I fair run along the street to the schoolhouse. It seemed as if I couldn't get there quick enough to begin the new way.

"The schoolhouse was lit up from cellar to garret and it looked sort of different and surprised at itself, and like it was sticking its head up. Maybe it sounds funny, but it sort of seemed to me the old brick building looked *conscious*, and like it had just opened its eyes and turned its face to something. Inside, the music was tuning up, the desks that was only part screwed down had been moved back; in one of the recitation-rooms we'd got the gas plates

for the candy making, and Abagail was in there stirring up lemonade in a big crock, and the other ladies, with white aprons on, was bustling round seeing to cutting the cakes.

"It wasn't a good seven-thirty before they begun coming in, the girls nipping in pretty dresses, the boys awkward and grinning, school-girls, shop-girls, Mis' Sykes's Em'ly an' Abe Luck and everybody — they come from all directions that night, I guess, just to see what it was like.

"And when they got set down, I realized for the first time that the law and some of the prophets of time to come hung on what kind of a time they had that first night.

"While I was thinking that, the music struck into a tune, hurry-up time, and before anybody could think it, there they were on their feet, one couple after another. And when the lilty sound of the dance and the sliding of feet got to going, like magic and as if they had dropped out of the walls, in come them that had been waiting around outside to see what we was really going to do. They come in, and they joined in and in five minutes the floor was full of them. And after being boxed in the house all day, or bottled in shops or polishing windows or mending eaves-troughs or taking photographs of humbly

houses or doing I donno what-all that they didn't like, here they were, come after their good time and having it — *and having it.*

Mis' Toplady was peeking through a crack in the recitation-room door.

"'*Dancin'!*' she says, with a little groan. 'I donno what my conscience'll say to me about this when it gets me alone.'

"'Well,' says Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss, seeing to the frosting on the ends of her fingers, 'I feel like they'd been pipin' to me for years an' I'd never let 'em dance. An' now they're dancin' up here safe an' light an' with us. An' I'm glad of it, to my marrow.'

"'I know,' says Mis' Toplady, wiping her eyes. 'I donno but *my* marrow might get use' to it.'

"Long about ten o'clock, when we'd passed the refreshments and everybody had carried their own plates back and was taking the candy out of the tins, I nudged Mis' Toplady and we slipped out into the schoolhouse entry and set down on the steps. We'd just heard the Through whistle, and we knew the School Board Iron Gate Committee was on it, and that they must of seen the schoolhouse lit from 'way acrost the marsh. Besides, I was counting on Eppleby to march them straight up there.

"And so he done. Almost before I knew it

they stepped out onto us, setting there in the starlight. I stood up and faced them, not from being brave, but from intending to jump *first.*

"'Silas and Timothy,' I says, 'what's done is done, but the consequences ain't. The Women's Evening Vigilance Committee that you appointed yourself has tried this thing, and now it's for us all to judge if it works.'

"'Heh!' says Silas, showing his teeth. 'Hed a little party, did you? Thought you'd get up a little party an' charge it to the Board, did you? Be su'prised, won't you, when you women get a bill for rent an' light for this night's performance?'

"'Real surprised,' I says, dry.

"'Amanda,' pipes up Timothy, 'air you a fool party to this fool doin's?'

"'Oh, shucks!' says Mis' Toplady, tired. 'I been doin' too real things to row, Timothy.'

"'Nev' mind,' says Silas, pacific. 'When the new iron gates gets here for this here entry, we won't have no more such doin's as this. They're ordered,' says Silas, like a bombshell, 'to keep out the hoodlums.'

"Then Eppleby, that had been peeking through the schoolhouse window, whirled around.

"'Yes,' says he. 'Let's put up the gates to keep out the hoodlums. But what you going

to do for the girls and boys of Friendship Village that ain't hoodlums? What you goin' to do for them? I want to tell you that I knew all about what was goin' on here to-night, and I give over the schoolhouse key myself. And now you look down there.'

"It was Friendship Village he pointed to, laying all around the schoolhouse slope, little lights shining for homes. And Eppleby went on before Silas and Timothy could get the breath to reply:—

"'The town's nothin' but *roots*, is it?' Eppleby says. 'Roots, sendin' up green shoots to the top o' this hill to be trained up here into some kind of shape to meet life. What you doin' to 'em? Buildin' 'em a great, expensive schoolhouse that they use a few hours a day, part o' the year, an' the rest of the time it might as well be a hole in the ground for all the good it does anybody. An' here's the young folks, that you built it *for* chasin' the streets to let off the mere flesh-an'-blood energy the Lord has give to 'em. Put up your iron gates if you want to, but don't put 'em up till the evenin's over an' till there's been some sort o' doin's here like this to give 'em what's their right. Put up your iron gates, but shame on the schoolhouse that puts 'em up an' stops there! Open the buildin' in the name

of public decency, but in the name of public decency, don't shut it up!'

"Timothy was starting to wave his arms when Mis' Toplady stood up, quiet, on the bottom step.

"'Timothy,' she says, 'thirty-five years ago this winter you an' I was keepin' company. Do you remember how we done it? Do you remember singin' school? Do you remember spellin' school? Did our straw ridin' an' sleigh ridin' to the Caledonia district schoolhouse for our fun ever hurt the schoolhouse, or do you s'pose we ever learnt any the less in it? Well, I remember; an' we both remember; an' answer me this: Do you s'pose them young things in there is any differ'nt than we was? An' what's the sin an' the crime of what they're doin' now? Look at 'em!'

"She pushed open the door. But just while we was looking, the music struck up the 'Home Sweet Home' waltz, and they all melted into dancing, the ladies in white aprons standing by the recitation-room doors looking on.

"'*Dancin'!*' says Timothy, shuddering — but looking, too.

"'Yes,' says Amanda, brave as you please, 'ain't it pretty? Lots prettier than chasin' up an' down Daphne Street. What say, Timothy?'

"Eppleby give Silas a little nudge. 'Le's give it a trial,' he says. 'This is the Vigilance Committee's idee. Le's give it a trial.'

"Silas stood bitin' the tail of his beard. 'Go on to destruction if you want to!' he says. 'I wash my hands of you!'

"'So do I,' says Timothy, echoish, 'wash mine.'

"Eppleby took them both by the shoulders. 'Well, then, go on inside a minute,' he says to 'em. 'Don't let's leave 'em all think we got stole a march on by the women!'

"And though it was that argument that made them both let Eppleby push them inside, still, when the door shut behind them, I knew there wasn't anything more to worry over. But me — I waited out there in the entry till the waltz was through. And it was kind of like the village down there to the foot of the hill was listening, quiet, to great councils.

X

"Up to Proudfit House the conservatory wasn't set aside from everyday living for just a place to be walked through and looked at and left behind for something better. It was a glass regular room, full of green, but not so full that it left you out of account. Willow chairs and a family of books and open windows into the other rooms made the conservatory all of a piece with the house, and at one end the tile was let go up in a big You-and-me looking fireplace, like a sort of shrine for fire, I use' to think, in the middle of a temple to flowers, and like both belonged to the household.

"On the day of the evening company at Proudfit House Robin was sitting with a book in this room. I'd gone up that day to do what I could to help out, and to see to Christopher some. Him I'd put to taking his nap quite awhile before, and I was fussing with the plants like I love to do — it seems as if while I pick off dead leaves and give the roots a drink I was kind of doing their thinking for them. When I heard Alex Proudfit coming acrost the library, I started to

go, but Robin says to me, 'Don't go, Miss Marsh,' she says, 'stay here and do what you're doing — if you don't mind.'

"'Land,' thinks I, turning back to the ferns, 'never tell me that young ladies are getting more up-to-date in love than they use' to be. My day, she would of liked that they should be alone, so be she could manage it without seeming to.'

"I donno but I'm foolish, but it always seems to me that a minute like that had ought to catch fire and leap up, like a time by itself. In all the relationships of men and women, it seems like no little commonplace time is so vital as the minute when the man comes into a room where a woman is a-waiting for him. There is about it something of time to be when he'll come, not to gloat over his day's kill, or to forget his day's care, but to talk with her about their day of hardy work. Habitual arriving in a room again and again for ever can never quite take off, seems though, the edge of that coming back to where she is. . . . . But somehow, that day, Alex Proudfit must have stepped through the door before the minute had quite caught fire, and Robin merely smiled up at him, calm and idle, from her low chair as he come to a chair beside her.

"'Tea, Robin Redbreast,' says he, 'is going to be here in a minute, with magnificent maca-

roons. But I think that you and I will have it by ourselves. Everybody is either asleep or pretending. I'm glad,' he tells her, 'you're the sort that can do things in the evening without resting up for from nine to ten hours preceding.'

"'I'm resting now,' Robin said; 'this is quite heavenly — this green room.'

"He looked at her, eager. 'Do you like it?' he asked. 'I mean the room — the house?'

"'Enormously,' she told him. 'How could I help it?'

"'I wanted you to like it,' he says. 'We shall not be here much, you know, but we shall be here sometimes, and I'm glad if you feel the feeling of home, even with all these people about. It's all going very decently for to-night, thanks to Mrs. Emmons. Not a soul that we really wanted has failed us.'

"'Except Mr. Insley,' Robin says.

"'Except Insley,' Alex concedes, 'and I own I can't make him out. Not because he didn't come here. But because he seems so enthusiastic about throwing his life away. Very likely,' he goes on, placid, 'he didn't come simply because he wanted to come. Those people get some sort of mediæval renunciation mania, I believe. Robin,' he went on, 'where do you think you would like to live? Not to settle

down, you know, but for the Eternal Place To Come Back To?'

"'To come back to?' Robin repeated.

"'The twentieth century home is merely that, you know,' Alex explained. 'We're just beginning to solve the home problem. We've tried to make home mean one place, and then we were either always wanting to get away for a while, or else we stayed dreadfully put, which was worse. But I think now we begin to see the truth: Home is nowhere. Rather, it is everywhere. The thing to do is to live for two months, three months, in a place, and to get back to each place at not too long intervals. Home is where you like to be for the first two weeks. When that wears off, it's home no more. Then home is some other place where you think you'd like to be. We are becoming nomadic again — only this time we own the world instead of being at its feet for a bare living. You and I, Robin Redbreast, are going to be citizens of the whole world.'

"Robin looked over at him, reflective. And it seemed to me as if the whole race of women that have always liked one place to get in and be in and stay in spoke from her to Alex.

"'But I've always had a little garden,' she says.

"'A little what?' Alex asks, blank.

"'Why, a garden,' she explains, 'to plant from year to year so that I know where things are going to come up.'

"She was laughing, but I knew she meant what she said, too.

"'My word,' Alex says, 'why, every place we take shall have a garden and somebody to grub about in it. Won't those and the conservatories do you?'

"'I like to get out and stick my hands in the spring-smelly ground,' she explains, 'and to remember where my bulbs are.'

"'But I've no objection to bulbs,' Alex says. 'None in the world. We'll plant the bulbs and take a run round the world and come back to see them bloom. No?'

"'And not watch them come up?' Robin says, so serious that they both laughed.

"'We want more than a garden can give,' Alex says then, indulgent. 'We want what the whole world can give.'

"She nodded. 'And what we can give back?' she says.

"He leaned toward her, touched along her hair.

"'My dear,' he said, 'we've got two of us to make the most of we can in this life: that's you

and I. The world has got to teach us a number of things. Don't, in heaven's name, let's be trying to teach the wise old world.'

"He leaned toward her and, elbow on his knee, he set looking at her. But she was looking a little by him, into the green of the room, and I guess past that, into the green of all outdoors. I got up and slipped out, without their noticing me, and I went through the house with one fact bulging out of the air and occupying my brain. And it was that sitting there beside him, with him owning her future like he owned his own, Robin's world was as different from Alex's as the world is from the Proudfits' conservatory.

"I went up to Chris, in the pretty, pinky room next to Robin's and found him sitting up in bed and pulling the ties out of the down comforter, as hard as he could. I just stood still and looked at him, thinking how eating and drinking and creating and destroying seems to be the native instincts of everybody born. Destroying, as I look at it, was the weapon God give us so that we could eat and drink and create the world in peace, but we got some mixed up during getting born and we got to believing that destruction was a part of the process.

"'Chris,' I says, 'what you pulling out?'

"'I donno those names of those,' he says. 'I call 'em little pulls.'

"'What are they for?' I ask' him.

"'I donno what those are for,' he says, 'but they come out *slickery*.'

"Ain't it funny? And ain't it for all the world the way Nature works, destroying what comes out *slickery* and leaving that alone that resists her? I was so struck by it I didn't scold him none.

"After a while I took him down for tea. On the way he picked up a sleepy puppy, and in the conservatory door we met the footman with the little tea wagon and the nice, drowsy quiet of the house went all to pieces with Chris in it:—

"'Supper, supper — here comes supper on a wagon, runnin' on litty wheels goin' wound an a-w-o-u-n-d —' says he, some louder than saying and almost to shouting. He sat down on the floor and looked up expectant: 'Five lumps,' he orders, not having belonged to the house party for nothing.

"'Tell us about your day, Chris,' Robin asks. 'What did you do?'

"'It isn't *by*, is it?' Chris says, anxious. 'Today didn't stop yet, did it?'

"'Not yet,' she reassures him. 'Now is still now.'

"'I want to-day to keep being now,' Chris said, 'because when it stops, then the bed is right there. It don't be anywhere near to-night, is it?' he says.

"'Not very near,' Robin told him. 'Well, then, what are you doing to-day?' she asks.

"'I'm to the house's party,' he explained. 'The house is having its party. An' I'm to it.'

"'Do you like this house, dear?' Robin asked.

"'It's nice,' he affirmed. 'In the night it — it talks wiv its lights. I saw it. With my daddy. When I was off on a big road.' Chris looked at her intent, from way in his eyes. 'I was thinkin' if my daddy would come,' he says, patient.

"Robin stoops over to him, quick, and he let her. He'd took a most tremendous fancy to her, the little fellow had, and didn't want her long out of his sight. 'Is that Robin?' he always said, when he heard anybody coming from any direction. She give him a macaroon, now, for each hand, and he run away with the puppy. And then she turned to Alex, her face bright with whatever she was thinking about.

"'Alex,' she says, 'he's a dear little fellow — a dear little fellow. And all alone. I've wanted so much to ask you: Can't we have him for ours?'

"Alex looks at her, all bewildered up in a

minute. 'How ours?' he asks. 'Do you mean have him educated? That, of course, if you really want it.'

"'No, no,' she says. '*Ours*. To keep with us, bring up, make. Let's let him be really ours.'

"He just leaned back in the big chair, smiling at her, meditative.

"'My dear Robin,' he says, 'it's a terrible responsibility to meddle that way with somebody's life.'

"She looked at him, not understanding.

"'It's such an almighty assumption,' he went on, 'this jumping blithely into the office of destiny — keeping, bringing-up, making, as you say — meddling with, I call it — anybody's life.'

"'Isn't it really meddling to let him be in a bad way when we can put him in a better one?' she asked, puzzled.

"'I love you, Robin,' says he, light, 'but not for your logic. No, my dear girl. Assuredly we will not take this child for ours. What leads you to suppose that Nature really wants him to live, anyway?'

"I looked at him over my tea-cup, and for my life I couldn't make out whether he was speaking mocking or speaking plain.

"'If Chris is to be inebriate, criminal, vicious, even irresponsible, as his father must be,' Alex says, 'Nature wants nothing of the sort. She wants to be rid of him as quickly as possible. How do you know what you are saving?'

"'How do you know,' Robin says, 'what you are letting go?'

"'I can take the risk if Nature can,' he contends.

"She sat up in her chair, her eyes bright as the daylight, and I thought her eagerness and earnestness was on her like a garment.

"'You have nobody to refer the risk to,' Robin says, 'Nature has us. And for one, I take it. So far as Chris is concerned, Alex, if no one claims him, I want him never to be out of touch with me.'

"But when a woman begins to wear that garment, the man that's in love with her — unless he is the special kind — he begins thinking how much sweeter and softer and *womaner* she is when she's just plain gentle. And he always gets uneasy and wants her to be the gentle way he remembers her being — that is, unless he's special, unless he's special. Like Alex got uneasy now.

"'My heavens, dear,' he says — and I judged Alex had got to be one of them men that lays a

lace 'dear' over a haircloth tone of voice, and so solemnly believes they're keeping their temper — 'My heavens, dear, don't misunderstand me. Experiment as much as you like. Material is cheap and abundant. If you don't feel the responsibility, have him educated wherever you want to. But don't expect me to play father to him. The personal contact is going it a little too strong.'

"'That is exactly what he most needs,' says Robin.

"'Come, dear,' says Alex, 'that's elemental— in an age when everybody can do things better than one can do them oneself.'

"She didn't say nothing, and just set there, with her tea. Alex was watching her, and I knew just about as sure what he was thinking as though I had been his own thought, oozing out of his mind. He was watching her with satisfaction, patterned off with a kind of quiet amusement and jabbed into by a kind of worryin' wonder. How exactly, he was thinking, she was the type everlasting of Wife. She was girlish, and in little things she was all I'll-do-as-you-say, and she was even shy; he believed that he was marrying a girl whose experience of the world was commendably slight, whose ideas about it was kind of vague — commendably again;

and whose ways was easy-handled, like skein silk. By her little firmnesses, he see that she had it in her to be firm, but what he meant was that she should adopt his ideas and turn firm about them. He had it all planned out that he was going to embroider her brain with his notions of what was what. But all of a sudden, now and then, there she was confronting him as she had just done then with a serious, settled look of Woman — the Woman everlasting, wanting a garden, wanting to work, wanting a child . . .

"In the doorway back of Alex, Bayless come in, carrying a tray, but it didn't have no card.

"'It's somebody to speak with you a minute, Mr. Proudfit,' says Bayless. 'It's Mr. Insley.'

"'Have him come here,' Alex says. 'I hope,' he says, when the man was gone, 'that the poor fellow has changed his mind about our little festivities.'

"Robin sort of tipped up her forehead. 'Why *poor?*' she asks.

"'Poor,' says Alex, absent, 'because he lives in a pocket of the world, instead of wearing the world like a garment — when it would fit him.'

"I was just setting my tea-cup down when she answered, and I recollect I almost jumped:

"'He knows something better to do with the world than to wear it at all,' was what she said.

"I looked over at her. And maybe it was because she was sort of indignant, and maybe it was because she thought she had dared quite a good deal, but all of a sudden something sort of seemed to me to set fire to the minute, and it leaped up like a time by itself as we heard Insley's step crossing the library and coming towards us. . . .

"When he come out where we were, I see right off how pale he looked. Almost with his greeting, he turned to Alex with what he had come for, and he put it blunt.

"'I was leaving the Cadozas' cottage on the Plank Road half an hour ago,' he said. 'A little way along I saw a man, who had been walking ahead of me, stagger and sprawl in the mud. He wasn't conscious when I got to him. He was little — I picked him up quite easily and got him back into the Cadozas' cottage. He still wasn't conscious when the doctor came. He gave him things. We got him in bed there. And then he spoke. He asked us to hunt up a little boy somewhere in Friendship Village, who belonged to him. And he said the boy's name was Chris.'

"It seemed like it was to Alex Proudfit's interested lifting of eyebrows rather than to Robin's exclamation of pity that Insley answered.

"'I'm sorry it was necessary to trouble you,' he says, 'but Chris ought to go at once. I'll take him down now.'

"'That man,' Robin says, 'the father — is he ill? Is he hurt? How badly is he off?'

"'He's very badly off,' says Insley, 'done for, I'm afraid. It was in a street brawl in the City — it's his side, and he's lost a good deal of blood. He walked all the way back here. A few hours, the doctor thought it would be, at most.'

"Robin stood up and spoke like what she was saying was a take-for-granted thing.

"'Oh,' she says, 'poor, poor little Chris. Alex, I must go down there with him.'

"Alex looks over at her, incredulous, and spoke so: 'You?' says he. 'Impossible.'

"I was just getting ready to say that of course I'd go with him, if that was anything, when from somewheres that he'd gone with the puppy, Chris spied Insley, and come running to him.

"'Oh, you are to the house's party, too!' Chris cried, and threw himself all over him.

"Robin knelt down beside the child, and the way she was with him made me think of that first night when she see him at the church, and when her way with him made him turn to her and talk with her and love her ever since.

"'Listen, dear,' she said. 'Mr. Insley came here to tell you something. Something about daddy — your daddy. Mr. Insley knows where he is, and he's going to take you to him. But he's very, very sick, dear heart — will you remember that when you see him? Remember Robin told you that?'

"There come on his little face a look of being afraid that give it a sudden, terrible grown-upness.

"'Sick like my mama was?' he asked in a whisper. 'And will he *go out*, like my mama?'

"Robin put her arm about him, and he turned to her, clung to her.

"'You come, too, Robin,' he said. 'You come, too!'

"She got up, meeting Alex's eyes with her straight look.

"'I must go, Alex,' she said. 'He wants me — needs me. Why, how could I do anything else?'

"Alex smiles down at her, with his way that always seemed to me so much less that of living every minute than of watching it live itself about him.

"'May I venture to remind you,' he says — like a little thin edge of something, paper, maybe, that's smooth as silk, but that'll cut neat and deep if you let it — 'May I venture to remind

you that your aunt is announcing our engagement to-night? I think that will have escaped your mind.'

"'Yes,' Robin says, simple, 'it had. Everything had escaped my mind except this poor little thing here. Alex — it's early. He'll sleep after a little. But I must go down with him. What did you come in?' she asked Insley, quiet.

"I told her I'd go down, and she nodded that I was to go, but Chris clung to her hand and it was her that he wanted, poor little soul, and only her. Insley had come up in the doctor's rig. She and I would join him with the child, she told him, at the side entrance and almost at once. There was voices in the house by then, and some of the young folks was coming downstairs and up from the tennis-court for tea. She went into the house with Chris. And I wondered if she thought of the thing I thought of and that made me glad and glad that there are such men in the world: Not once, not once, out of some felt-he-must courtesy, had Insley begged her not to go with him. He knew that she was needed down there with Chris and him and me — he knew, and he wouldn't say she wasn't. Land, land I love a man that don't talk with the outside of his head and let what he means lay cramped somewheres underneath,

but that reaches down and gets up what he means, and holds it out, for you to take or to leave.

"Mis' Emmons was overseeing the decorations in the dining room. The whole evening party she had got right over onto her shoulders the way she does everything, and down to counting the plates she was seeing to it all. We found her and told her, and her pity went to the poor fellow down there at the Cadozas' almost before it went to Chris.

"'Go, of course,' she said. 'I suppose Alex minds, but leave him to me. I've got to be here — but it's not I Chris wants in any case. It's you. Get back as soon as you can, Robin.'

"I must say Alex done that last minute right, the way he done everything, light and glossy. When Robin come down, I was up in the little seat behind the doctor's cart, and Alex stood beside and helped her. A servant, he said, would come on after us in the automobile with a hamper, and would wait at the Cadozas' gate until she was ready to come back. Somehow, it hadn't entered anybody's head, least of all, I guess, Alex's own, that he should come, too. He see us off with his manners on him like a thick, thick veil, and he even managed to give to himself a real dignity so that Robin

said her good-by with a kind of wistfulness, as if she wanted to be reassured. And I liked her the better for that. For, after all, she *was* going — there was no getting back of that. And when a woman is doing the right thing against somebody's will, I'm not the one to mind if she hangs little bells on herself instead of going off with no tinkle to leave herself be reminded of, pleasant.

"We swung out onto the open road, with Chris sitting still between the two of them, and me on the little seat behind. The sunset was flowing over the village and glittering in unfamiliar fires on the windows. The time was as still as still, in that hour 'long towards night when the day seems to have found its harbour it has been looking for and to have slipped into it, with shut sails — so still that Robin spoke of it with surprise. I forget just what she said. She was one of them women that can say a thing so harmonious with a certain minute that you never wish she'd kept still. I believe if she spoke to me when I was hearing music or feeling lifted up all by myself, I wouldn't mind it. What she'd say would be sure to fit what was being. They ain't many folks in anybody's life like that. I believe she could talk to me any time, sole unless it's when I first wake up in the morn-

ing; then any talking always seems like somebody stumbling in, busy, among my sleeping brains.

"For a minute Insley didn't say anything. I was almost sure he was thinking how unbelievable it was that he should be there, alone with her, where an hour ago not even one of his forbidden dreams could have found him.

"'Beautifully still,' he answered, 'as if all the things had stopped being, except some great thing.'

"'I wonder,' she says, absent, 'what great thing.' And all the time she seemed sort of relaxed, and resting in the sense — though never in the consciousness — that the need to talk and to be talked to, to suggest and to question, had found some sort of quiet, levelling process with which she was moving along, assentin'.

"Insley stooped down, better to shield her dress from the mud there was. I see him look down at her uncovered hands laying on the robe, and then, with a kind of surprise, up at her face; and I knew how surprising her being near him seemed.

"'That would be one thing for you,' he answered, 'and another for me.'

"'No,' she says, 'I think it's the same thing for us both.'

"He didn't let himself look at her, but his voice — well, I tell you, his voice looked.

"'What do you mean?' he says — just said it a little and like he didn't dare trust it to say itself any more.

"'Why, being able to help in this, surely,' she says.

"I could no more of helped watching the two of them than if they had been angels and me nothing but me. I tried once or twice to look off across the fields that was smiling at each other, same as faces, each side of the road; but my eyes come back like they was folks and wanted to; and I set there looking at her brown hair, shining in the sun, without any hat on it, and at his still face that was yet so many kinds of alive. He had one of the faces that looked like it had been cut out just the way it was *a-purpose*. There wasn't any unintentional assembling of features there, part make-shift and part rank growth of his race. No, sir. His face had come to life by being meant to be just the way it was, and it couldn't have been better. . . . It lit up wonderful when he answered.

"'Yes,' he said, 'a job is a kind of creation. It's next best to getting up a sunrise. Look here,' he remembered, late in the day, 'you'll

have no dinner. You can't eat with them in that place. And you ought to have rest before to-night.'

"Ain't it funny how your voice gets away from you sometimes and goes dilly-nipping around, pretty near saying things on its own account? I use' to think that mebbe my voice didn't belong to the me I know about, but was some of the real me, inside, speaking out with my mouth for a trumpet. I donno but I think so yet. For sometimes your voice is a person and it says things all alone by itself. So his voice done then. The tender concern of it was pretty near a second set of words. It was the first time he had struck for her the great and simple note, the note of the caring of the man for the physical comfort of the woman. And while she was pretending not to need it, he turned away and looked off toward the village, and I was certain sure he was terrified at what might have been in his voice.

"'I like to think of it down there,' he said, pretty near at random, 'waiting to be clothed in a new meaning.'

"'The village?' she asked.

"'Everywhere,' he answered. 'Some of the meanings we dress things up in are so — dowdy. We wouldn't think of wearing them ourselves.'

"She understood him so well that she didn't have to bother to smile. And I hoped she was setting down a comparison in her head: Between clothing the world in a new meaning, and wearing it for a garment.

"Chris looked up in Insley's face.

"'I'm new,' he contributes, 'I'm new on the outside of me. I've got on this new brown middie.'

"'I've been admiring it the whole way,' says Insley, hearty — and that time his eyes and Robin's met, over the little boy's head, as we stopped at the cottage gate.

XI

"THE lonesome little parlour at Mis' Cadoza's was so far past knowing how to act with folks in it, that it never changed expression when we threw open the shutters. Rooms that are used to folks always sort of look up when the shutters are opened; some rooms smile back at you; some say something that you just lose, through not turning round from the window quite quick enough. But Mis' Cadoza's parlour was such a poor folkless thing that it didn't make us any reply at all nor let on to notice the light. It just set there, kind of numb, merely enduring itself.

"'You poor thing,' I thought, 'nobody come in time, did they?'

"Insley picked out a cane-seat rocker that had once known how to behave in company, and drew it to the window. Ain't it nice, no matter what kind of a dumb room you've got into, you can open its window and fit the sky onto the sill, and feel right at home. . . .

"Robin sat there with Chris in her arms, waiting for any stir in the front bedroom. I went in the bedroom, while Dr. Heron told me

about the medicine, and it seemed to me the bare floor and bare walls and dark-coloured bed-covers was got together to suit the haggardy unshaven face on the pillow. Christopher's father never moved. I set in the doorway, so as to watch him, and Insley went with the doctor to the village to bring back some things that was needed. And I felt like we was all the first settlers of somewheres.

"Chris was laying so still in Robin's arms that several times she looked down to see if he was awake. But every time his eyes was wide and dark with that mysterious child look that seems so much like thought. It kind of hurt me to see him doing nothing — that's one of the parts about sickness and dying and some kinds of trouble that always twists something up in my throat: The folks that was so eager and able and flying round the house just being struck still and not able to go on with everyday doings. I know when Lyddy Ember, the dress-maker, died and I looked at her laying there, it seemed to me so surprising that she couldn't hem and fell and cut out with her thumb crooked like she done — and that she didn't know a dart from a gore; her hands looked so much like she knew how yet. It's like being inactive made death or grief double. And it's like work-

ing or playing around was a kind of life. . . . The whole house seemed inactive and silence-struck, even to the kitchen where Mis' Cadoza and the little lame boy was.

"Robin set staring into the lilacs that never seemed to bloom, and I wondered what she was thinking and mebbe facing. But when she spoke, it was about the Cadoza kitchen.

"'Miss Marsh,' she says, 'what kind of people must they be that can stay alive in a kitchen like that?'

"'Pioneers,' I says. 'They's a lot of 'em pioneerin' away and not knowing it's time to stop.'

"'But the dirt —' she says.

"'What do you expect?' I says. 'They're emergin' out of dirt. But they *are* emergin'.'

"'Don't it seem hopeless?' says she.

"'Oh, I donno,' I says; 'dirt gets to be apples — so be you plant 'em.'

"But the Cadoza kitchen *was* fearful. When we come through it, Mis' Cadoza was getting supper, and she'd woke up nameless smells of greasy things. There the bare table was piled with the inevitable mix-up of unwashed dishes that go along with the Mis' Cadozas of this world, so that you wonder how they ever got so much crockery together. There the floor

wasn't swept, clothes was drying on a line over the stove, Spudge was eating his supper on the window-sill, and in his bed in the corner lay little Eph, so white and frail and queer-coloured that you felt you was looking on something bound not to last till much after you'd stopped looking. And there was Mis' Cadoza. When we had come through the kitchen, little Eph had said something glad at seeing Insley and hung hold of his hand and told him how he meant to model a clay Patsy, because it was Patsy, the dog, that had gone out in the dark and first brought Insley in to see him.

"'An' when I'm big,' the child says, 'I'm going to make a clay *you*, Mr. Insley.'

Mis' Cadoza had turned round and bared up her crooked teeth.

"'Don't you be impident!' she had said, raspish, throwing her hand out angular.

"Mis' Cadoza was like somebody that hadn't got outside into the daylight of *Yet*. She was ignorant, blind to life, with some little bit of a corner of her brain working while the rest lay stock-still in her skull; unclean of person, the mother to no end of nameless horrors of habit—and her blood and the blood of some creature like her had been poured into that poor little boy, sickly, bloodless, not ready for the struggle.

"'*Is* there any use trying to do anything with anybody like that?' says Robin.

"'*Is* there?' says I, but I looked right straight at Christopher. If there wasn't no use trying to do anything with little Eph, with his mother out there in the kitchen, then what was the use of trying to do anything with Chris, with his father here in the front bedroom? Sick will, tainted blood, ruined body — to what were we all saving Chris? Maybe to misery and final defeat and some awful going out.

"'I don't know,' she says, restless. 'Maybe Alex is right. . . .'

"She looked out towards the lilac bushes again, and I knew how all of a sudden they probably dissolved away to be the fine green in the conservatory at Proudfit House, and how she was seeing herself back in the bright room, with its summer of leaves, and before the tea wagon, making tea for Alex lounging in his low chair, begging her not, in heaven's name, to try to teach the wise old world. . . .

". . . I knew well enough how she felt. Every woman in the world knows. In that minute, or I missed my guess, she was finding herself clinging passionate and rebellious to the mere ordered quiet of the life Alex would make for her; to the mere outworn routine, the leisure

of long days in pretty rooms, of guests and house parties and all the little happy flummery of hospitality, the doing-nothingness, or the nice tasks, of travelling; the joy of sinking down quiet into the easy ways to do and be. Something of the sheer, clear, mere self-indulgence of the last-notch conservative was sweeping over her, the quiet, the order, the plain *safety* of the unchanging, of going along and going along and leaving things pretty much as they are, expecting them to work themselves out . . . the lure of all keeping-stillness. And I knew she was wondering, like women do when they're tired or blue or get a big job to do or see a house like the Cadozas', why, after all, she shouldn't, in Alex's way, make herself as dainty in morals and intellect as she could and if she wanted to 'meddle,' to do so at arm's length, with some of the material that is cheap and abundant — like Chris. . . .

"'Maybe there isn't any use trying to do anything with Chris, either,' I says brutal. 'Mebbe Nature's way *is* best. Mebbe she knows best when to let them die off.'

"Robin's arms kind of shut up on the little kiddie. He looked up.

"'Did you squeeze me on purpose?' he whispered.

"She nodded at him.

"'What for?' he asks.

"'Just loving,' she answered.

"After that, we sat still for a long time. Insley came back with the medicine, and told me what to do if the sick man came to. Then he filled and lit the bracket lamp that seemed to make more shadows than light, and then he stopped beside Robin — as gentle as a woman over a plant — and asked her if she wanted anything. He come through the room several times, and once him and her smiled, for a still greeting, almost as children do. After a while he come with a little basket of food that he had had Abagail put up to the bakery, and we tried to eat a little something, all of us. And all the while the man on the bed lay like he was locked up in some new, thick kind of silence.

"When eight o'clock had gone, we heard what I had been expecting to hear — the first wheels and footsteps on the Plank Road directed towards Proudfit House. And Insley come in, and went over to Robin, and found Chris asleep in her arms, and he took him from her and laid him on the sagging Brussels couch.

"'You must go now,' he says to Robin, with his kind of still authority that wan't ordering nor schoolmastery, nor you-do-as-I-say, but was

just something that made you want to mind him. 'I'll wake Chris and take him in at the least change — but you must go back at once.'

"And of course I was going to stay. Some of my minds was perfectly willing not to be at the party in any case, and anyhow the rest of them wanted to stay with Chris.

"Insley picked up some little belongings of hers, seeming to know them without being told, and because the time was so queer, and mebbe because death was in the next room, and mebbe for another reason or two, I could guess how, all the while he was answering her friendly questions about the little Cadoza boy — all that while the Personal, the *Personal*, like a living thing, hovered just beyond his words. And at last it just naturally came in and possessed what he was saying.

"'I can't thank you enough for coming down here,' he says. 'It's meant everything to Chris — and to me.'

"She glanced up at him with her pretty near boyish frankness, that had in it that night some new element of confidence and charm and just being dear.

"'Don't thank me,' she says, 'it was mine to do, too. And besides, I haven't done anything. And I'm running away!'

"He looked off up the road towards where, on its hill, Proudfit House was a-setting, a-glowing in all its windows, a-waiting for her to come, and to have her engagement to another man announced in it, and then to belong up there for ever and ever. He started to say something — I donno whether he knew what or whether he didn't; but anyhow he changed his mind and just opened the door for her, the parlour door that I bet was as surprised to be used as if it had cackled.

"The Proudfit motor had stood waiting at the gate all this while, and as they got out to it, Dr. Heron drove up, and with him was Mis' Hubbelthwait come to enquire. So Robin waited outside to see what Dr. Heron should say when he had seen Chris's father again, and I went to the door to speak to Mis' Hubbelthwait.

"'Liquor's what ails him fast enough,' Mis' Hubbelthwait whispers — Mis' Hubbelthwait would of whispered in the middle of a forty-acre field if somebody had said either birth or death to her. 'Liquor's what ails him. I know 'em. I remember the nice, well-behaved gentleman that come to the hotel and only lived one night after. "Mr. Elder," I says to him, severe, "you needn't to tell me your stomach ain't one livin'

pickle, for I know it is!" An' he proved it by dyin' that very night. If he didn't prove it, I don't know what he did prove. "Alcoholism," Dr. Heron called it, but I know it was liquor killed him. No use dressin' up words. An' I miss my guess if this here poor soul ain't the self-same river to cross.'

"She would have come in, but there's no call for the whole town to nurse a sick-bed, I always think — and so she sort of hung around a minute, sympathetic and mum, and then slimpsed off with very little starch to her motions, like when you walk for sick folks. I looked out to where Robin and Insley was waiting by the big Proudfit planet that was going to take her on an orbit of its own; and all of a sudden, with them in front of me and with what was behind me, the awful *good-byness* of things sort of shut down on me, and I wanted to do something or tell somebody something, I didn't know what, before it was too late; and I run right down to them two.

"'Oh,' I says, scrabblin' some for my words, 'I want to tell you something, both of you. If it means anything to either of you to know that there's a little more to me, for having met both of you — then I want you to know it. And it's true. You both — oh, I donno,' I says, 'what

it is — but you both kind of act like life was a person, and like it wasn't just your dinner to be et. . . . And I kind of know the person, too. . . .'

"I knew what I meant, but meant things and said things don't often match close. And yet I donno but they understood me. Anyway, they both took hold of a hand of mine, and said some little broke-off thing that I didn't rightly get. But I guess that we all knew that we all knew. And in a minute I went back in the house, feeling like I'd got the best of some time when I might of wished, like we all do, that I'd let somebody know something while then was then.

"When I got inside the door, I see right off by Dr. Heron's face that there'd been some change. And sure enough there was. Chris's father had opened his eyes and had spoke. And I done what I knew Robin would have wanted; I wheeled round and went to the door and told her so.

"'He's come to,' I says, 'and he's just asked for Chris.'

"Sharp off, Robin turned to say something to the man waiting in the automobile. Insley tried to stop her, but she put him by. They come back into the cottage together, and the

Proudfit automobile started steaming back to Proudfit House without her.

"Once again Robin roused Chris, as she had roused him on the night when he slept on the church porch; she just slipped her hands round his throat and lifted his face, and this time she kissed him.

"'Come with Robin,' she said.

"Chris opened his eyes and for a minute his little senses come struggling through his sleep, and then with them come dread. He looked up in Robin's face, piteous.

"'Did my daddy *go out?*' he asks, shrill, 'like my mama did?'

"'No, no, dear,' Robin said. 'He wants you to say good-by to him first, you know. Be still and brave, for Robin.'

"There wasn't no way to spare him, because the poor little figure on the bed was saying his name, restless, to restless movements. I was in there by him, fixing him a little something to take.

"'Where's Chris?' the sick man begged. 'Look on the church steps —'

"They took Chris in the room, and Insley lifted him up to Robin's knee on the chair beside the bed.

"'Hello — my nice daddy,' Chris says, in

his little high voice, and smiles adorable. 'I — I — I was waitin' for you all this while.'

"His father put out his hand, awful awkward, and took the child's arm about the elbow. I'll never forget the way the man's face looked. It didn't looked *used*, somehow — it looked all sort of bare and barren, and like it hadn't been occupied. I remember once seeing a brand-new house that had burned down before anybody had ever lived in it, and some of it stuck up in the street, nice new doors, nice hardwood stairway, new brick chimney, and everything else all blackened and spoiled and done for, before ever it had been lived in. That was what Chris's father's face made me think of. The outline was young, and the eyes was young — young and burning — but there was the man's face, all spoiled and done for, without ever having been used for a face at all.

"'Hello, sonny,' he says, weak. 'Got a good home?'

"'He's in a good home, with good people, Mr. Bartlett,' Insley told him.

"'For keeps?' Chris's father asks, his eyes burning at Insley's over the boy's head.

"'We shall look after him somehow, among us,' Robin says. 'Don't worry about him, Mr. Bartlett. He's all right.'

"The father's look turned toward her and it sort of lingered there a minute. And then it lit up a little — he didn't smile or change expression, but his look lit up some.

"'You're the kind of a one I meant,' he says. 'I wanted he should have a good home. I—I done pretty good for you, didn't I, Chris?' he says.

"Chris leaned way over and pulled at his sleeve. 'You — you — you come in our house, too,' he says.

"'No, sonny, no,' says the man. 'I guess mebbe I'm — goin' somewheres else. But I done well by you, didn't I? Your ma and I always meant you should hev a good home. I'm glad — if you've got it. It's nicer than bein' with me — ain't it? Ain't it?'

"Chris, on Robin's knee, was leaning forward on the bed, his hand patting and pulling at his father's hand.

"'If you was here, then it is,' the child says.

"At that his father smiled — and that was the first real, real look that had come into his face. And he looked around slow to the rest of us.

"'I wasn't never the kind to hev a kid,' he says. 'The drink had me — had me hard. I knew I'd got to find somebody to show him — about growin' up. I'm glad you're goin' to.'

"He shut his eyes and Chris threw himself forward and patted his face.

"'Daddy!' he cried, 'I wanted to tell you — I had that hot ice-cream an'—an'—an' tea on a litty wagon. . . .'

"Robin drew him back, hushed him, looked up questioning to Insley. And while we all set there, not knowing whether to leave or to stay, the man opened his eyes, wide and dark.

"'I wish't it had been different,' he said. 'Oh — *God*. . . .'

"Chris leans right over, eager, towards him.

"'Didn't he say anything back?' he says.

"'I guess so,' the man says, thick. 'I guess if you're a good boy, he did.' Then he turned his head and looked straight at Robin. 'Don't you forget about his throat, will you?' he says. 'It — gets — sore — awful — easy. . . .'

"He stopped talking, with a funny upsetting sound in his voice. It struck me then, like it has since, how frightful it was that neither him nor Chris thought of kissing each other — like neither one had brought the other up to know how. And yet Chris kissed all of us when we asked him — just like something away back in him knew how, without being brought up to know.

"He knew how to cry, though, without no

bringing up, like folks do. As Robin come with him out of the room, Chris hid his face in her skirts, crying miserable. She set down by the window with him in her arms, and Insley went and stood side of them, not saying anything. I see them so, while Dr. Heron and I was busy for a minute in the bedroom. Then we come out and shut the door — ain't it strange, how one minute it takes so many people around the bed, and next minute, there's the one that was the one left in there all alone, able to take care of itself.

"Dr. Heron went away, and Robin still set there, holding Chris. All of a sudden he put up his face.

"'Robin,' he says, 'did — did my daddy leave me a letter?'

"'A letter?' she repeated.

"'To tell me what to do,' says the child. 'Like before. On the church steps.'

"'No — why, no, Chris,' she answers him. 'He didn't have to do that, you know.'

"His eyes was holding hers, like he wanted so much to understand.

"'Then how'll I know?' he asks, simple.

"It seemed to me it was like a glass, magnifying living, had suddenly been laid on life. Here he was, in the world, with no 'letter' to tell him what to do.

"All she done was just to lay her cheek right close to his cheek.

"'Robin is going to tell you what to do,' she says, 'till you are big enough to know.'

"Insley stood there looking at her, and his face was like something had just uncovered it. And the minute seemed real and simple and almost old — as if it had begun to be long, long before. It was kind of as if Robin's will was the will of all women, away back for ever and ever in time, to pour into the world their power of life and of spirit, through a child.

"Insley went out in the kitchen to see Mis' Cadoza about some arrangements — if 'Arrangements' means funerals, it always seems like the word was spelt different and stiffer — and we was setting there in that sudden, awful idleness that comes on after, when there was the noise of an automobile on the Plank Road, and it stopped to the cottage and Alex Proudfit come springing up to the front door. He pushed it open and come in the room, and he seemed to put the minute in capitals, with his voice and his looks and his clothes. I never see clothes so black and so white and so just-so as Alex Proudfit's could be, and that night they was more just-so than usual. That night, his hands, with their

thick, strange ring, and his dark, kind of *even* face was like some fancy picture of a knight and a lover. But his face never seemed to me to be made very much a-purpose and just for him. It was rather like a good sample of a good brand, and like a good sample of any other good brand would have done him just as well. His face didn't fit him inevitable, like a cork to a bottle. It was laid on more arbitrary, like a window on a landscape, and you could have seen the landscape through any other window just as well, or better.

"'Robin!' he said, 'why did you let the car come back without you? We've been frantic with anxiety.'

"She told him in a word or two what had happened, and he received it with his impressions just about half-and-half: one-half relief that the matter was well over and one-half anxiety for her to hurry up. Everyone was at the house, everyone was wondering. Mrs. Emmons was anxious. . . . 'My poor Robin, you've overtaxed your strength,' he ends. 'You'll look worn and not yourself to-night. It's too bad of it. Come, for heaven's sake, let's be out of this. Come, Calliope. . . .'

He asked her if she had anything to bring, and he gathered up what she told him was hers. I

got ready, too, so's to go up to Proudfit House to put Chris to bed and set by him awhile. And just as I was going out to let Insley know we was leaving, the door to the other room opened and there stood Mis' Cadoza. I see she'd twisted her hair over fresh and she'd put on a collar. I remember now the way I felt when she spoke.

"'I've got the coffee pot on and some batter stirred up,' says she, kind of shame-faced. 'I thought mebbe some hot pan-cakes and somethin' hot to drink'd go good — with Mr. Insley an' all of you.'

"Alex started to say something — heaven knows what — but Robin went right straight up to Mis' Cadoza — and afterwards I thought back to how Robin didn't make the mistake of being too grateful.

"'How I'd like them!' she says, matter-of-fact. 'But I've got a lot of people waiting for me, and I oughtn't to keep them. . . .'

"Insley spoke up from where he was over on the edge of little Eph's bed, and I noticed Mis' Cadoza had tried to neaten up the kitchen some, and she'd set the table with oil-cloth and some clean dishes.

"'I was afraid you'd all stay,' he says, 'and I do want all the pan-cakes. Hurry on — you're keeping back our supper.'

"He nodded to Alex, smiled with us, and come and saw us out the door. Mis' Cadoza come too, and Robin and I shook hands with her for good-night. And as Mis' Cadoza stood there in her own door, seeing us off, and going to be hostess out in her own kitchen, I wondered to myself if it was having a collar on, or what it was, that give her a kind of pretty near dignity.

"I got in the front seat of the car. Chris was back in the tonneau between Robin and Alex, and as we started he tried to tell Alex what had happened.

"'My — my — my daddy ——' he says.

"'Poor little cuss,' says Alex. 'But how extremely well for the child, Robin, that the beggar died. Heavens, how I hate your going in these ghastly places. My poor Robin, what an experience for *to-night!* For our to-night. . . .'

"She made a sudden move, abrupt as a bird springing free of something that's holding it. She spoke low, but I heard every word of it.

"'Alex,' she said, 'we've made a mistake, you and I. But it isn't too late to mend it now.'

XII

"'I HOPE, Calliope,' said Postmaster Silas Sykes to me, 'that you ain't in favour of women suffrage.'

"'No, Silas,' says I, 'I ain't.'

"And I felt all over me a kind of a nice wild joy at saying a thing that I knew a male creature would approve of.

"Silas was delivering the groceries himself that day, and accepting of a glass of milk in my kitchen doorway. And on my kitchen stoop Letty Ames — that had come home in time for the Proudfit party — was a-sitting, a-stitching away on a violet muslin breakfast-cap. It was the next day after the party and my regular wash-day and I was glad to be back in my own house, washing quiet, with Emerel Daniel to help me.

"'At school,' says Letty, 'everybody was for it.'

"'I know it,' says Silas, gloomy. 'The schools is goin' to the dogs, hot-foot. Women suffrage, tinkerin' pupils' teeth, cremation — I don't know

what-all their holdin' out for. In my day they stuck to 'rithmetic and toed the crack.'

"'That isn't up to date, Mr. Sykes,' says Letty, to get Silas riled.

"It done it. He waved his left arm, angular.

"'Bein' up to date is bein' up to the devil,' he begun, raspish, when I cut in, hasty and peaceful.

"'By the way, Silas,' I says, 'speaking of dates, it ain't more'n a *year* past the time you aldermen was going to clear out Black Hollow, is it? Ain't you going to get it done *this* spring?'

"'Oh, dum it, no,' Silas says. 'They're all after us now to get to pavin' that new street.'

"'That street off there in the marsh. I know they are,' I says innocent. 'Your cousin's makin' the blocks, ain't he, Silas?'

"Just then, in from the shed where she was doing my washing come Emerel Daniel — a poor little thing that looked like nothing but breath with the skin drawn over it — and she was crying.

"'Oh, Miss Marsh,' she says, 'I guess you'll have to leave me go home. I left little Otie so sick — I hadn't ought to of left him — only I did want the fifty cents. . . .'

"'Otie!' I says. 'I thought Otie was getting better.'

"'I've kept sayin' so because I was ashamed to let folks know,' Emerel says, 'an' me leavin' him to work. But I had to have the money —'

"'Land,' I says, 'of course you did. Go on home. Silas'll take you in the delivery wagon, won't you, Silas? You're going right that way, ain't you?'

"'I wasn't,' says Silas, 'but I can go round that way to oblige.' That's just exactly how Silas is.

"'Emerel,' I says, 'when you go by the Hollow, you tell Silas what you was tellin' me — about the smells from there into your house. Silas,' I says, 'that hole could be filled up with sand-bar sand dirt cheap, now while the river's low, and you know it.'

"'Woman —' Silas begins excitable.

"'Of course you can't,' I saved him the trouble, 'not while the council is running pavement halfway acrost the swamp to graft off'n the Wooden Block folks. That's all, Silas. I know you, head and heart,' I says, some direct.

"'You don't understand city dealin's no more'n — Who-a!' Silas yells, pretending his delivery horse needed him, and lit down the walk, Emerel following. Silas reminds me of the place in the atmosphere where a citizen ought to be, and ain't.

"Emerel had left the clothes in the bluing water, so I stood and talked with Letty a minute, stitching away on her muslin breakfast-cap.

"'I'd be for women voting just because Silas isn't,' she says, feminine.

"'In them words,' says I to her, 'is some of why women shouldn't do it. The most of 'em reason,' I says, 'like rabbits!'

"Letty sort of straightened up and looked at me, gentle. She just graduated from the Indian Mound School and, in spite of yourself, you notice what she says. 'You're mistaken, Miss Marsh,' says she, 'I believe in women voting because we're folks and mothers, and we can't bring up our children with men taking things away from 'em that we know they'd ought to have. I want to bring up my children by my votes as well as by my prayers,' says she.

"'*Your* children!' says I.

"I donno if you've ever noticed that look come in a girl's face when she speaks of her children that are going to be sometime? Up to that minute I'd 'a' thought Letty's words was brazen. But when I see how she looked when she said it, I sort of turned my eyes away, kind of half reverent. We didn't speak so when I was a girl. The most we ever heard mentioned like that was when our mothers showed us our first baby dress

and told us that was for *our* baby — and then we always looked away, squeamish.

"'That's kind of nice,' I says, slow, 'your owning up, out loud that way, that maybe you might possibly have — have one, sometime.'

"'My mother has talked to me about it since I began to know — everything,' Letty said.

"That struck awful near home.

"'I always wisht,' I says, 'I'd talked with my mother — like that. I always wisht I'd had her tell me about the night I was born. I think everybody ought to know about that. But I remember when she begun to speak about it, I always kind of shied off. I should think it would of hurt her. But then,' I says, 'I never had any of my own. So it don't matter.'

"'Oh, yes, you have, Miss Marsh,' says Letty.

"I looked at her, blank.

"'Every child that's born belongs to you,' says Letty to me, solemn.

"'Go on,' says I, to draw her out. 'I wouldn't own most of the little jackanapesses.'

"'But you *do*,' says Letty, 'and so do I! So does every woman, mother or not.'

"She set the little violet muslin cap on her head to try it, and swept up and made me a little bow. Pretty as a picture she looked, and ready for loving. . . . I always wonder if things

ain't sometimes arranged to happen in patterns, same as crystals. For why else should it be that at that instant minute young Elbert Sykes, Silas's son, that was home for the party and a little longer, come up to my door with a note from his mother — and see Letty in the violet cap, bowing like a rose?

"While they was a-talking easy, like young folks knows how to do nowdays, I read the note; and it was about what had started Silas to talking suffrage. Mis' Sykes had opened her house to a suffrage meeting that evening, and Mis' Martin Lacy from the City was a-going to talk, and would I go over?

"'Land, yes,' I says to Elbert. 'Tell her I'll come, just for something to do. I wonder if I can bring Letty, too?'

"'Mother'd be proud, I know,' says Elbert, looking at her like words, and them words a-praising. They had used to play together when they was little, but school had come in and kind of made them over.

"'*So*,' says he to Letty, bantering, 'you're in favour of women voting, are you?'

"She broke off her thread and looked up at him.

"'Of course I am,' she says, giving a cunning little kitten nod that run all down her shoulders.

"'So you think,' says Elbert, 'that you're just as strong as I am — to carry things along? Mind you, I don't say as clever. You're easily that. But put it at just *strong*.'

"She done the little nod again, nicer than the first time.

"'You talk like folks voted with their muscles,' says she. 'Well, I guess some men do, judging by the results.'

"He laughed, but he went on.

"'And you think,' he says, 'that you would be just as wonderful in public life as you would be in your home — your very own home?'

"Letty put the last stitch in her muslin cap and she set it on her head — all cloudy and rose-budded, and land, land, she was lovely when she looked up.

"'Surely,' she says from under the ruffle, with a little one-cornered smile.

"He laughed right into her eyes. 'I don't believe you think so,' he says, triumphant. And all of a sudden there come a-sticking up its head in his face the regular man look — I can't rightly name it, but every woman in the world knows it when she sees it — a kind of an *I'm the one of us two but don't let's stop pretending it's you* look.

"When she see it, what do you suppose Letty

done? First she looked down. Then she blushed. Then she shrugged up one shoulder and laughed, sort of little and low and soft. *And she kept still.* She was about as much like the dignified woman that had just been talking to me about women's duty as a bow of blue ribbon is like my work apron. And as plain as the blue on the sky, I see that *she liked the minute when she let Elbert beat her — liked it,* with a sort of a glow and a quiver.

"He laughed again, and, 'You stay just the the way you are,' he says, and he contrived to make them common words sort of flow all over her like petting.

"That evening, when we marched into the Sykes's house to the meeting, he spoke to her like that again. The men was invited to the meeting, too, but Mis' Sykes let it be known that they needn't to come till the coffee and sandwiches, thus escaping the speech. Mis' Sykes ain't in favour of suffrage, but she does love a new thing in town, and Mis' Martin Lacy was so well dressed and so soft-spoken that Mis' Sykes would of left her preach foot-binding in her parlour if she'd wanted to. Mis' Sykes is like that. Letty was about the youngest there, and she was about the prettiest I 'most ever saw; and when he'd got them all seated,

young Elbert Sykes, that was the only man there, just naturally gravitated over and set down by her, like the Lord meant. I love to see them little things happen, and I never smile at them, same as some. Because it's like I got a peek in behind the curtain and see the eternal purpose working away, quiet and still.

"Well, Mis' Lacy, she talked, and she put things real sane and plain, barring I didn't believe any of what she said. And pretty soon I stopped trying to listen and I begun thinking about Emerel Daniel. I'd been down to see her just before supper, and I hadn't had her out of my head much of the time since. Emerel's cottage wasn't half a block from Black Hollow, the great low place beyond the river road that the town used as a dump. It was full of things without names, and take it on a day with the wind just right, Emerel had to keep her window shut on that side of her house. Water was standing in the hollow all the whole time. Flies and mosquitoes come from it by the flock and the herd. And when I'd held my nose and scud past it that afternoon to get to Emerel's, I'd almost run into Dr. Heron, just coming out from seeing Otie, and I burst right out with my thoughts all over him, and asked him if Black Hollow wasn't what was the matter

with Otie and if it wasn't all that was the matter with him.

"'Unquestionably,' says Dr. Heron. 'I told Mrs. Daniel six months ago that she must move.'

"'Well,' says I, 'not having any of her other country homes open this year, Emerel had to stay where she was. And Otie with her. But what did you say to the council about filling in the hole?'

"'The council,' says Dr. Heron, 'is paving the county swamp. There's a good crop of wooden blocks this year.'

"'True enough,' says I, grim, 'and Otie is a-paying for it.'

"That was exactly how the matter stood. And all the while Mis' Lacy was a-talking her women suffrage, I set there grieving for Emerel, and wondering how it was that Silas Sykes and Timothy Toplady and Jimmy Sturgis and even Eppleby Holcomb, that belonged to the common council, *could* set by and see Otie die, and more or less of the rest of us in the same kind of danger.

"Next I knew, Mis' Lacy, that was all silky movements and a sweet voice, had got through her own talk and was asking us ladies to express ourselves. Everybody felt kind of delicate at first, and then Libby Liberty starts up and spoke her mind:—

"'*I* believe all you've been a-saying,' she says, 'and I hev for twenty years. I never kill a hen without I realize how good the women can do a human being's work if they're put to it.'

"'I always think of that, too,' says Mis' Hubbelthwait, quick, 'about the hotel. . . .' She kind of stopped, but we all knew what she meant. Threat is seldom if ever sober, especially on election day; but he votes, and she only runs the hotel and keeps them both out of the poorhouse.

"'Well, look at me,' says Abagail Arnold, 'doin' work to oven and to counter, an' can't get my nose near nothin' public but my taxes.'

"'Of course,' says Mis' Uppers, rocking, 'I've almost *been* the mayor of Friendship Village, bein' his wife, so. An' I must say he never done a thing I didn't think I could do. Or less it was the junketin' trips. I'd 'a' been down with one o' my sick headaches on every one o' them.'

"'Men *know* more,' admitted Mis' Fire Chief Merriman, 'but I donno as they can *do* any more than us. When the Fire Chief was alive an' holdin' office an' entertaining politicians, I use' often to think o' that, when I had their hot dinner to get.'

"'I s'pose men do know more than we do,' says Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss, re-

flective. 'I know Eppleby is lightnin' at figures, an' he can tell about time-tables, an' he sees sense to fine print parts o' the newspapers that looks like so many doctors' prescriptions to me. An' yet honestly, when it comes to some questions of sense, I've known Eppleby not to have any.'

"'Jimmy, either,' says Mis' Sturgis, confidential. 'I donno. I've thought about that a good deal. It seems as if, if we got the chance, us women might not vote brilliant at first, but we would vote with our sense. The sense that can pick out a pattern and split a receipt, an' dress the children out o' the house money. I bet there's a lot o' that kind o' sense among women that don't get used up, by a long shot.'

"Mis' Timothy Toplady drew her shawl up her back, like she does.

"'Well-a,' she says, 'Timothy's an awful good husband, but when I see some of the things he buys for the house, an' the way he gets took in on real estate, I often wonder if he's such a good citizen as he lets on.'

"I kep' a-wondering why Letty didn't say something, and by and by I nudged her.

"'Go on, speak up,' I intimated.

"And, same time, I heard Elbert Sykes, on the other side, say something to her, low. 'I

could tell them,' he says to her, 'that to look like you do is better than being elected!'

"And Letty — what do you s'spose? — she just glanced up at him, and made a little kind of a commenting wrinkle with her nose, and looked down and kept her silence. Just like he'd set there with a little fine chain to her wrist.

"We talked some more and asked some questions and heard Mis' Lacy read some, and then it was time for the men. They come in together — six or eight of them, and most of them, as it happened, members of the common council. And when Mis' Sykes had set them down on the edge of the room, and before anybody had thought of any remark to pass, Mis' Lacy she spoke up and ask' the men to join in the discussion, and called on Mis' Sykes, that hadn't said nothing yet, to start the ball a-rolling.

"'*Well*,' says Mis' Sykes, with her little society pucker, 'I must say the home and bringup my children seems far, far more womanly to me than the tobacco smoke and whiskey of public life.'

"She glanced over to the men, kind of with a way of arching her neck and they all gave her a sort of a little ripple, approving. And with this Mis' Toplady kind of tossed her head up.

"'Oh, well, I don't want the responsibility,' she says. 'Land, if I was a votin' woman, I should feel as if I'd got bread in the pan and cake in the oven and clothes in the bluin' water all the whole time.'

"'He, he, he!' says Timothy, her lawful lord. And Silas and Jimmy Sturgis and the rest joined in, tuneful.

"Then Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss, she vied in, and done a small, careless laugh.

"'Oh, well, me, too,' she says, 'I declare, as I get older an' wake up some mornin's I feel like life was one big breakfast to get an' me the hired girl. If I had to vote besides, I donno what I *would* do.'

"'An',' says Mis' Hubbelthwait, 'I always feel as if a politician was a disgrace to be, same as an actor, *unless* you got to be a big one. An' can us women ever be big ones even if we want? Which I'm sure I don't want,' she says, sidling a look towards the men's row.

"'Oh, not only that,' says Abagail Arnold, 'but you'd feel so kind of sheepish votin' for the President, away off there in Washington. I always feel terrible sheepish even prayin' for him, let alone votin' — an' like it *couldn't* make no real difference.'

"'Oh, an' *ladies!*' says Mis' Mayor Uppers,

'really it's bad enough to have been the wife of a mayor. If I had to vote an' was in danger of coming down with a nomination for somethin' myself, I couldn't get to sleep nights.'

"'Mercy,' said Mis' Fire Chief Merriman, 'a mayor is nothin' but a baby in public life compared to a fire chief. A mayor gets his night's rest. Could a woman ever chase to fires at three o'clock in the mornin'? An' if she votes, what's to prevent her bein' elected to some such job by main strength?'

"'Or like enough get put on a jury settin' on a murderer, an' hev to look at dug-up bones an' orgins,' says Mis' Sturgis — her that's an invalid and gloomy by complexion.

"And one and all, as they spoke, they looked sidewise to the men for their approval. And they got it.

"'That's the ticket!' says Timothy Toplady, slapping his knee. 'I tell you, gentlemen, we've got a nice set of women folks here in this town. They don't prostitute their brains to no fool notions.'

"There was a little hush, owing to that word that Timothy had used kind of uncalled for, and then a little quick buzz of talk to try to cover it. And in the buzz I heard Elbert saying to Letty:

"'You *know* you think of yourself in a home

afterward — and not around at polls and things, Letty.'

"'You don't have to board at the polls because you vote there, you know,' Letty said; but she says it with a way, with a way. She said it like a pretty woman talking to a man that's looking in her eyes and thinking how pretty she is, and she knows he's thinking so. And you can't never get much real arguing done that way.

"It always kind of scares me to see myself showed up — and now it was like I had ripped a veil off the whole sex, and off me, too. I see us face to face. Why was it that before them men had come in, the women had all talked kind of doubtful and suffrage-leaning, and then had veered like the wind the minute the men had come on the scene? Mis' Toplady had defied Timothy time after time, both public and private; Mis' Hubbelthwait bosses her husband not only drunk but sober; Mis' Sturgis don't do a thing Jimmy wants without she happens to want it too — and so on. Yet at the mention of this one thing, these women that had been talking intelligent and wondering open-minded had all stopped being the way they was and had begun to say things sole to please the men. Even Libby Liberty had kept still — her that has a regular tongue in her head. And Letty, that

believed in it all, and had talked to me so womanly that morning, she was listening and blushing for Elbert and holding her peace. And then I remembered, like a piece of guilt, sensing that nice, wild feeling I myself had felt that morning a-denying woman suffrage in the presence of Postmaster Silas Sykes. What in creation ailed us all?

"*What in creation.* . . . Them words sort of steadied me. It looked to me like it was creation itself that ailed us yet. Creation is a thing that it takes most folks a good while to recover from. . . .

". . . I remembered seeing Silas's delivery boy go whistling along the street one night, and pass a cat. The cat wasn't doing nothing active. It was merely idle. But the boy brought up a big shingle he was carrying and swished it through the air and says 'Z-t-t-t-t,' to the cat's heels, to see the cat take to them — which it done — like the cat immemorial has done for immemorial boys, delivery and other. And once, at dusk, a big, strange man with a gun on his shoulder passed me on Daphne Street, and when he done so, he says to me 'Z-t-t-t,' under his breath, just like the boy to the cat, and just like the untamed man immemorial has said when he got the chance. It seemed to me like men was

created with, so to say, a shingle and a gun, for the hunting, and just as there is joy in their hunting, so there is a palpitatin' delight in being hunted and flattered by being caught and bound, hand and foot and mind.

"'We like it — why, I tell you, we like it,' I says to myself, 'and us here in Mis' Sykes's parlour are burning with the old original, left-over fire, breathed at creation into women's breasts!'

"And it seemed like I kind of touched hands with all the women that used to be. And I looked over to that row of grinning, tired men, not so very much dressed up, and I thought:—

"'Why, you're the men of this world and we're the women, and there ain't no more thrilling fact in this universe. And why don't we all rec-o'nize it and shut up?'

"That was what I was thinking over in my mind while Mis' Martin Lacy said good night to us and rushed off to catch her train for the City, hoping she had made us see some light. That was what I was still going over when Mis' Sykes called me to help with the refreshments. And then, just as I started out to the kitchen, the outside door that was part open was pushed in and somebody come in the room. It was Emerel Daniel, in calico and no hat. And as

soon as we see her face, everybody stopped talking and stared. She was white as the tablecloth and shaking.

"'Oh, ladies,' she says, 'won't one of you come down to the house? Otie's worse — I donno what it is. I donno what to do to take care of him.'

"She broke down, poor, nervous little thing, and sort of swallowed her whole throat. And Mis' Toplady and we all rushed right over to her.

"'Why, Emerel,' Mis' Toplady says, 'I thought Otie was getting ever so much better. Is it the the real typhoid, do you s'pose?' she ask' her.

"Emerel looked over to me. 'Isn't it?' she says. And then I spoke right up with all there is to me.

"'Yes, sir,' I says, 'it is the real typhoid. And if you want to know what's giving it to him, ladies and gentlemen, ask the common council that's setting over there by the wall. Dr. Heron says that Black Hollow, that's a sink for the whole town, give it to him, and that nothing else did — piled full of diseases right in back of Emerel's house. And if you want to know who's responsible for his dying if he dies,' I says right out, 'look over in the same direction to the men that wouldn't vote to fill in the

Black Hollow with sand because they needed the money so bad for paving up half the county swamp.'

"'It was most as still in the room as when Timothy had said 'prostitute.' All but me. I went right on — nothing could of kept me still then.

"'Us ladies,' I says, 'has tried for two years to get the Council to fill in that hole. We've said and said what would happen to some of us, what with our pumps so near the place, and what with flies from it visiting our dinner-table dishes, sociable and continual. What did you say to us? You said women hadn't no idee of town finances. Mebbe we ain't — mebbe we ain't. But we have got some idea of town humanity, if I do say it, that share in it. And this poor little boy has gone to work and proved it.'

"With that, Emerel, who had been holding in — her that's afraid even to ask for starch if you forget to give it to her — she broke right down and leaned her head on her arm on the clock shelf: —

"'Oh,' she says, 'all the years I been giving him his victuals and his bath and sewing his clothes up, I never meant it to come to this — for no reason. If Otie dies, I guess he needn't of — that's the worst. He needn't of.'

"Mis' Toplady put her arm right around Emerel and kind of poored her shoulder in that big, mother way she's got — and it was her that went with her, like it's always Mis' Toplady that does everything. And us ladies turned around and all begun to talk at once.

"'Let's plan out right here about taking things in to Emerel,' says Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss. 'I've got some fresh bread out of the oven. I'll carry her a couple of loaves, and another couple next baking or two.'

"'I'll take her in a hen,' says Libby Liberty, 'so be she'll kill it herself.'

"Somebody else said a ham, and somebody some butter, and Libby threw in some fresh eggs, if she got any. Mis' Hubbelthwait didn't have much to do with, but she said she would take turns setting up with Otie. Mis' Sykes give a quarter — she don't like to bake for folks, but she's real generous with money. And Silas pipes in:—

"'Emerel can have credit to the store till Otie begins to get better,' he said. 'I ain't been lettin' her have it. She's looked so peaked I been afraid she wan't a-goin' to be able to work, an' I didn't want she should be all stacked up with debts.'

"But me, I set there a-thinking. And all of a sudden I says out what I thought: 'Ladies,' I

says, 'and all of you: What to Emerel is hens and hams and credit? They ain't,' I says, 'nothing but patches and poultices on what's the trouble up to her house.'

"Eppleby Holcomb, that hadn't been saying much, spoke up:—

"'I know,' he says, 'I know. You mean what good do they do to the boy.'

"'I mean just that,' I says. 'What good is all that to Otie that's lying over by Black Hollow? And how does it keep the rest of the town safe?'

"'Well,' says Silas, eager, 'let's us get out the zinc wagon you ladies bought, and let's us go to collectin' the garbage again so that won't all be dumped in Black Hollow. And leave the ladies keep on payin' for it. It's real ladies' work, I think, bein' as it's no more'n a general scrapin' up of ladies' kitchens.'

"Then Letty Ames, that hadn't been saying anything, spoke up, to nobody in particular:—

"'Otie's a dear little soul,' she said, 'a dear little soul!'

"'Ain't he?' says Mame Holcomb. 'Eppleby 'most always has a nut or somethin' in his pocket to give him as he goes by. He takes it like a little squirrel an' like a little gentleman.'

"'He's awful nice when he comes in the shop,' said Abagail. 'He looks at the penny-apiece kind

and then buys the two-for-a-cent, so's to give his mother one.'

"'He knows how to behave in a store,' Silas admitted. 'I 'most always give him a coffee-berry, just to see him thank me.'

"'He come into the hotel one day,' says Mis' Hubbelthwait, 'an' stood by me when I was bakin'. I give him a little wad of dough to roll.'

"'I let him drive the 'bus one day, settin' on my knee,' says Jimmy Sturgis. 'He was a nice, careful, complete little cuss.'

"Eppleby Holcomb nodded with his eyes shut.

"'We don't like folks to swing on our front gate,' he says. 'He done it, but he marched right in and told us he'd done it. I give him a doughnut — an' he's kep' right on swingin' an' ownin' up an' eatin' doughnuts.'

"'Even when he chased my chickens,' says Libby Liberty, 'he chased 'em like a little gentleman — *towards* the coop an' not down the road. I always noticed that about him.'

"'Yes,' says Letty, again, 'he's a dear little soul. *What makes us let him die?*'

"She said it so calm that it caught even my breath — and my breath, in these things, ain't easy caught. But I got it right back again, and I says:—

"'Yes, sir. He was on the way to being

somebody that Friendship Village could have had for the right kind of an inmate. And now he'll be nothing but a grave, that's no good to anybody. And Sodality,' I couldn't help adding, 'will likely pitch right in and take care of his grave, tasteful.'

"And when I said that, it come over me how Emerel had dressed him and bathed him and made his clothes, and done washings, tireless, to get the fifty cents — besides bringing him into the world, tedious. And now it was all going for nothing, all for nothing — when we could of helped it. And I plumped out with what I'd said that morning to Silas :—

"'Why don't you fill up Black Hollow with sand-bar sand out of the river, now it's so low? Then, even if it's too late for Otie, mebbe we can keep ourselves from murderin' anybody else.'

"Them half a dozen men of the common council set still a minute, looking down at Mis' Sykes's parlour ingrain. And I looked over at them, and my heart come up in my throat and both of them ached like the toothache. Because all of a sudden it seemed to me it wasn't just Timothy and Eppleby and Silas and some more of the council setting there by the wall — but it was like, in them few men, tired and not so very well dressed, was setting the lawmakers

of the whole world; and there in front of them, wasn't only Mis' Holcomb and Libby and Letty and me, but Emerel Daniel, too, and all the women there is — saying to them: 'My land, we've dressed 'em an' bathed 'em an' sewed for 'em an' brought 'em into the world, tedious. Let 'em live — fix things so's they can live an' so's it needn't all go for nothin'.' And I sort of bubbled up and spilled over, as if everything we was all of us *for* had come up in my throat.

"'Oh, folks,' I says, 'just look what us in this room could have done for Otie — so be we'd begun in time.'

"Right like a dash of cold water into my face, Mis' Sykes spoke up, cold as some kind of death:—

"'Well, ladies,' she says, 'I guess we've got our eyes open now. *I* say that's what we'd ought to hev been doin' instead o' talkin' women votin',' she says, triumphant.

"Then somebody spoke again, in a soft, new, not-used-to-it little voice, and in her chair over beside Elbert, Letty Ames leaned forward, and her eyes was like the sunny places in water.

"'Don't you see,' she says, 'don't you see, Mis' Sykes, that's what Mis' Lacy meant?'

"'How so?' says Mis' Sykes, short.

"I'll never forget how sweet and shy and un-

expected and young Letty looked, but she answered, as brave as brave: —

"'Otie Daniel is sick,' she said, 'and all us women can do is to carry him broth and bread and nurse him. It's only the men that can bring about the things to make him well. And they haven't done it. It's been the women who have been urging it — and not getting it done. Wasn't it our work to do, too?'

"I see Elbert looking at her — like he just couldn't bear to have her speak so, like some men can't. And I guess he spoke out in answer before he meant to: —

"'But let them do it womanly, Letty,' he said, 'like your mother did and my mother did.'

"Letty turned and looked Elbert Sykes straight in the face: —

"'*Womanly!*' she says. 'What is there womanly about my bathing and feeding a child inside four clean walls, if dirt and bad food and neglect are outside for him? Will you tell me if there is anything more womanly than my right to help make the world as decent for my children as I would make my own home?'

"I looked at Letty, and looked; and I see with a thrill I can't tell you about how Letty seemed. For she seemed the way she had that morning on my kitchen stoop, when she spoke

of her children and when I felt like I'd ought to turn away — the way I'd used to when my mother showed me my baby dress and told me who it would be for. Only now — only now, somehow, I didn't want to turn away. Somehow I wanted to keep right on looking at Letty, like Elbert was looking. And I see what he see. How Letty was what she'd said that morning that she was — and that I was — and that we all was : A mother, then and there, whether she ever had any children or not. And she was next door to owning up to it right there before them all and before Elbert. We didn't speak so when I was a girl. We didn't own up, out loud, that we ever thought anything about what we was for. But now, when I heard Letty do it. . . .

". . . Now, when I heard Letty do it, all to once, I looked into a window of the world. And instead of touching hands like I had with the women that use' to be, I looked off and off down all the time there's going to be, and for a minute I touched, tip-fingers, the hands of the other women that's coming towards me; and out of places inside of me that I didn't know before had eyes, I see them, mothers to the whole world, *inside their four walls and out.* And they wasn't coming with poultices and bread and broth in their hands, to patch up what had been left

undone; nor with the keys to schoolhouses that they'd got open by scheming; nor with newspapers full of health that they'd had to run down back alleys to sell; nor national holidays that they'd got a-hold of through sheer accident; nor yet with nice new headstones for cemetery improvements on the dead and gone — no, sir, their hands wasn't occupied with any of these ways of serving that they'd schemed for and stole. But their hands — was in men's hands, closer and nearer than they'd ever been before. And their eyes was lit up with a look that was a new look, and that give new life to the old original left-over blaze. And I looked across to that row of tired men, not so very much dressed up, and I thought: —

"'You're the men of this world and we're the women. And there ain't no more thrilling fact in this universe, save one, *save one:* And that's that we're all human beings. That your job and ours is to make the world ready for the folks that are to come, and to make the folks that come fit to live in that new world. And yet over there by Black Hollow one of our children is dying from something that was your job *and* ours to do, and we didn't take hold of hands and do it!'

"'Oh, Letty!' I says out. 'And Silas and

all of you! Let's pretend, just for a minute, that we was all citizens and equal. And let's figure out things for Otie, just like we had the right!'

"I'd asked Letty to spend the night with me, and Elbert walked home with us. And just as we got there, he says to her again: —

"'Oh, Letty — you ain't *strong* enough to help carry things along!'

"'You've got more strength,' she says to him, 'and more brains. But it isn't so much the strength or the brains in women that is going to help when the time comes. It's the — mother in them.'

"And I says to myself: —

"'And it's the — *human beingness* of them.' But Letty didn't know that yet.

"Elbert answered, after a minute: —

"'You may be right and you may be wrong, but, Letty, Letty, what a woman you are!'

"And at that Letty looked up at him, just as she had looked at him that morning — just for a minute, and then she dipped down the brim of her big hat. I donno what she answered him. I didn't care. I didn't care. For what I see was the old wild joy of a woman in being glorified by a male creature. And I knew then,

and I know now, that that won't never die, no matter what.

"Elbert put out his hand.

"'Good night, Letty,' he said.

"She gave him hers, and he closed over it light with his other hand.

"'May I see you to-morrow?' he asked her.

"'Oh, I don't know,' said Letty. 'Come and see if I'll see you — will you?'

"He laughed a little, looking in her eyes.

"'At about eight,' he promised. 'Good night. . . .'

"I got the key out from under the mat to a tune inside me. Because I'd heard, and I knew that Letty had heard, that tone in Elbert's voice that is the human tone — I can't rightly name it, but every woman in the world knows it when she hears it — a tone that says: *If I have my way, you and I are going to live out our lives together.*

"And I knew then, and I know now, that that tone won't ever die, either. And some day, away off in a new world right here on this earth, I believe there's going to be a wilder joy in being men and women than all the men and women up to now have ever lived or dared or dreamed.

XIII

"'Miss Marsh,' says Christopher.

"Mis' Emmons's living-room was like a cup of something cool, and I set there in the after-supper light having such a nice rested time drinking it in that at first I didn't hear him.

"'Miss Marsh,' he says again, and pulled at my dress. I put out my hand to him and he took it. Sometimes I donno but hands are a race of beings by themselves that talk and answer and do all the work and act like slaves and yet really rule the world.

"'Is it me telling my feet where to go or do they tell me where I go?' asked Christopher.

"'You can have it either way you want,' I told him. 'Some does one way and some does the other. Which way do you like?'

"He thought for a minute, twisting on one foot with the other up in his hand.

"'I'd like 'em to know how without our sayin' so,' he announces finally.

"'Well,' I says, 'I left out that way. That's really the best way of all.'

"He looked at me eager.

"'Is it a game?' he says.

"'Yes,' I told him.

"'What's its name?' he ask' me.

"'Game of Life,' I told him again.

"He thought about it, still twisting. Then he done one of his littlest laughs, with his head turned away.

"'My feet heard you,' he says. 'Now they know how to play.'

"'I hope so, Christopher,' says I, and kissed him on the back of his neck. That made him mad, like it usually done.

"'My neck is my neck,' says he, 'and it's shut in my collar. It ain't home to-day.'

"'Is your mouth home?' I ask' him.

"And it was.

"I could of set there talking with him all evening, but not on the night of Sodality's Annual. I'd stopped by for Mis' Emmons. She was getting ready, and while I waited I could hear folks passing on their way to the schoolhouse where the meeting was. For the town was all het up about what the meeting was going to do.

"I'd seen half-dozen or so of us that afternoon when we was putting plants on the hall platform, and we'd all spoke our minds.

"'I'm gaspin',' observed Mis' Sturgis, 'to take a straw vote of us on this amendin' busi-

ness. Near as I can make out, it's going through.'

"'Near as I can make out,' says Mame Holcomb, 'a good deal more than amending is going on here to-night. It looks to me as if Sodality was just going to get into its own Cemetery and be forgot, and as if something else was coming to meet us — something big!'

"Mis' Toplady spoke up, comfortable, down on her knees putting green paper on the pots.

"'Well, my land!' she says, 'I've noticed two-three things in my lifetime. And one is, that do what whoever will, things do change. And so whenever a new change pops up, I always think: "Oh, I guess you're comin' along anyway. I donno's I need to help." An' yet somethin' in me always prances to pitch in, too.'

"Timothy was there, occupying himself with the high places us ladies couldn't get up to.

"'Well,' says he, 'if folks stop dying, like Sodality evidently intends they shall if it goes out of business, maybe you'll stay home some, Amandy, and not always be off laying folks out.'

"'I know it,' Mis' Toplady returns, 'I've laid out most everybody I know, and of course I'm real glad to do it. But the last dead's hair I done up, I caught myself thinking how

much more interesting it'd be if they was alive an' could find fault. Doin' for the dead gets kind of monotonous, *I* think.'

"'*I* don't,' says Timothy, decided. 'The minute you work for the living, you get all upset with being criticised. I s'pose the dead would find fault, if they could, over the way you cut the grass for 'em. But they can't an' so there's an end to it, an' we get along, peaceful. If they was living folks layin' there, you can bet they'd do some back talk.'

"'Well,' says I, 'I've been sick of Sodality for years. But it was about the most what-you-might-call society I had, and I hated to give it up.'

"'Me, either,' says Mame Holcomb.

"'Me, either,' says Mis' Uppers. 'I declare I've often said I wouldn't know what *to* do if folks stopped dyin' so's Sodality would have to close out.'

"Mis' Sykes was setting watching the rest of us.

"'Well,' she observes, cold, 'if I was usin' the dead to keep in society, I donno's I'd own it up.'

"Silas Sykes had just come over from the store to see if there was anything he could meddle in.

"'Heh!' says he, showing his teeth. 'Not

many of Sodality, as I can see, *deserves* to die and be done for, civilized.'

"'Don't you worry yourself, Silas Sykes,' says I, 'we're going to be done things for before we die hereafter, and more civilized than ever you dreamed of, all up and down your ledger. That's where you do dream, ain't it, Silas?' I says. And though I said it gay, I meant it frank.

"I remember I looked off down the room, and all of a sudden I see it as it would be that night, packed with folks. Somehow, we'd got to saying less about the Sodality part of the meeting, and more about the *open* part. Most of the town would be there. We'd got the School Board to leave us announce the second party for that night, following the meeting, and music was coming, and us ladies had froze the ice-cream, and the whole time reminded me of a big bud, flowered slow and bursting sudden.

"'Land, land,' I says, fervent, 'I feel like Friendship Village was a person that I was going to meet to-night for the first time.'

"'You express yourself so odd sometimes, Calliope,' says Mis' Sykes, distant — but Mis' Toplady and Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss, they both looked up and nodded, and they knew.

"I set holding Christopher in Mis' Emmons's living-room, and thinking about this and most everything else, when I looked out and see Insley going along. He hadn't been back in town since Christopher's father's funeral, two days before, and I'd been wanting to talk over with him a thing or two that was likely to come up at the meeting, that of course he was going to be at, and that had to be handled with thimbles on every finger, or somebody'd get pricked. So I rapped smart on the upper sash and called to him through the screen, but not before I had seen the look on his face. I've caught that special look only once or twice in my life — the look of somebody passing the house that is different to them from all other houses in the world. The look that wants to be a look and won't let itself be, that tries to turn the other way and can't start, that thinks it's unconscious and knows it isn't, and that finally, with Insley, give it up and looked Mis' Emmons's house straight in the face for a minute, as if he might anyhow let himself have that much intimacy.

"I had a little list of things I wanted to see go through that night. Enough of us was ready to have Sodality perform its last cemetery rite and bury itself so that that was pretty sure to go through, but I wanted more than that,

and several of us ladies did; and it looked to me like the schoolhouse and the young folks and the milk and the meat of this town could be done nice things to, so be we managed the meeting right. I even had a wild dream that the whole new society might adopt Christopher. Well, I donno why that's funny. It ain't funny when a club makes a building or a play or a bazaar or a dinner. Why shouldn't it make a man?

"I told some of this to Insley, and he caught fire and lit up into a torch and had it all thought out beforehand, better than I could of dreamed it. But he made me feel bad. Haunted folks — folks haunted by something that was and that isn't — always makes me feel bad. How is it possible, I see he was asking himself the old, wore-out question, to drive out of the world something that is the world?

"While we talked, Christopher went off to sleep in my arms, and even while I was so interested, I was enjoying the change that comes — the head growing heavier and heavier on my arm, as if sleep weighed something.

"'Poor little kiddie,' I says, stupid.

"'Rich little kiddie,' Insley says, wistful.

"'Dear little kiddie,' says somebody else.

"In the dining room doorway Robin stood — in a doorway as we had first seen her.

"'Put him over here on the couch, do,' she says. 'It's much too hot to hold him, Calliope.'

"She'd called me that at Mr. Bartlett's funeral, and I recollect how my throat went all over me when she done so. Ain't it funny about your own first name? It seems so *you* when somebody nice says it for the first time — more you than you ever knew you were.

"Insley lifted Chris in his arms to do as she said, and then stood staring at her across the child.

"'I've been thinking,' he said, blunt — it's like watching the sign of folks to watch the different kind of things that makes them blunt. 'It's not my affair, but do you think you ought to let Chris get so — so used to you? What will he do when you're — when you go away?'

"At this she said nothing for a moment, then she smiled up at him.

"'I meant what I told him that night his father died,' she answered. 'I'm going to keep Chris with me, always.'

"'Always?' He stared at her, saw her face mean what she said. 'How fine of you! How fine of Mr. Proudfit!' said Insley.

"She waited just a breath, then she met his eyes, brave.

"'Not fine of me,' she says — 'only fine for me.

And not — Mr. Proudfit at all. I ought to take back what I told you — since I did tell you. That is not going to be.'

"I don't think Insley meant for a minute to show any lack of formal respect for Christopher's sleep. But what Insley did was simply to turn and sit him down, bolt upright, on my lap. Then he wheeled round, trying to read her face.

"'Do you mean you aren't going to marry him?' he demanded, rough — it's like watching another sign of folks to watch for the one thing that will make one or another rough.

"'We are not going to be married,' she said. 'I mean that.'

"I suppose likely the room went away altogether then, Christopher and me included, and left Insley there in some place a long ways from everywhere, with Robin's face looking at him. And he just naturally took that face between his hands.

"'Robin,' he said, 'don't make me wait to know.'

"Insley was the suddenest thing. And land, what it done to her name to have him say it. Just for a minute it sounded as if her name was the population of the world, — but with room for everybody else, too.

"I think she put up her hands to take down

his hands, but when she touched them, I think hers must have closed over his, next door to on purpose.

"'Dear,' she says, 'tell me afterward.'

"In that minute of stillness in which any new heaven is let down on a suitable new earth, a little voice piped up:—

"'Tell it now,' says the voice. 'Is it a story? Tell it now.'

"And there was Christopher, wide awake where he had been set down rude on my knee, and looking up at them, patient.

"'I was dreamin' my dream,' he explained, polite. 'It was about all the nice things there is: You and you and you and hot ice-cream and the house's party. . . . Is they any more?' he asked, anxious.

"Robin put out her arms for him, and she and Insley and I smiled at one another over his head.

"'Ever so many more,' we told him.

"I slipped out then and found Mis' Emmons, and I guess I come as near shining as anything that's like me can.

"'What's the matter?' she says to me. 'You look as if you'd turned up the wick.'

"'I did. They have. I won't tell,' I says.

'Oh, Mis' Emmons, I guess the meeting to-night won't need to adopt Christopher.'

"She looked up at me quick, and then she started shining, too.

"'What a universe it is,' she says, '— what a universe it is.'

"Then we went off down to the meeting together. And the village was wonderful to go through, like a home some of us had hollowed out of the hills and was living in, common. As we went walking to the schoolhouse, the sidewalks seemed to me no more than ways dickered up to fasten us together, and to fasten us to them whose feet had wore the road before us, and to lead us to them that was coming, coming after: Christopher and Eph and Spudge Cadoza and Otie Daniel, or them like these. Otie Daniel had died the night before. Dr. Barrows had said Eph would not be lame, but we see he wan't sure of the value of the boy's physical life. But even so, even so we had a chance with Chris, and we had a chance with Spudge, and we had millions more. My feet wanted to run along them roads to meet the millions and my fingers tingled to get things ready. And as we went down Daphne Street to that meeting, I see how we all *was* getting things ready, and I could of sung out for what I saw:—

"For Mame Holcomb, sprinkling clothes on the back porch and hurrying to get to the hall.

"For Mis' Uppers, picking her currants before she went, so's to get an early start on her jam in the morning.

"For Viny Liberty, setting sponge for her bread loud enough so we heard her clear out in the street, and for Libby, shutting up her chicken coop that they earned their own living with.

"For Mis' Toplady, driving by with Timothy, and her in the brown silk she'd made herself, like she's made all she's got.

"For Abagail Arnold, wiping out her window to be filled to-morrow with the pies of her hand.

"For little Mis' Sparks, rocking her baby on the front stoop and couldn't come to the meeting at all, 'count of having nobody to leave him with.

"For them that had left cloth bleaching in their side yards and was saving the price of buying bleached. For them that had done their day's work, from parlour to wood-shed, and had hurried up the supper dishes and changed their dress and was on their way to the schoolhouse. For them that had lived lives like this and had died at it. For all the little dog-eared, wore-out account books where every one of them women

figured out careful what they couldn't spend. And I looked down the street till I couldn't see no farther, and yet Daphne Street was going on, round and round the world, and acrost and acrost it, full of women doing the same identical way. And I could see away off to the places that Daphne Street led past, where women has all these things done for them and where the factories is setting them free, like us here in the village ain't free just yet, and I felt a wicked envy for them that can set their hands to the New Work, that us here in Friendship Village is trying so hard to get in between whiles. And I could see away ahead to times when sponge and currants and clothes and coops and similar won't have to be mothered by women 'most as much as children are; but when women, Away Off Then, will be mothers and workers and general human beings such as yet we only know how to think about being, scrappy and wishful. But all the time, in their arms and in ours and nowheres else, lays all the rest of the world that is ever going to be. And something in me kind of climbed out of me and run along ahead and looked back at me over its shoulder and says: 'Keep up, keep up, Calliope.' And before I knew it, right out loud, I says: 'I will. I will.'

"An hour later, up in the schoolhouse, Silas Sykes stood arguing, to the top of his tone, that the first work of the reorganized society — that was to take in the whole town — had ought to be to buy a bargain Cupid-and-fish fountain he knew of, for the market square.

"'It's going to take years and years to do — everything,' says Mis' Emmons to me, low.

"But that didn't seem like much of anything to either of us. 'What if it is,' I says. And she nodded."

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